

BYZANTIUM AND THE CHRISTIANS IN THE WORLD OF ISLAM: CONSTANTINOPLE AND THE CHURCH IN THE HOLY LAND IN THE NINTH CENTURY*

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In the eighth century, Christians living in the Holy Land made substantial contributions to the life of the Greek-speaking church of Byzantium. John of Damascus (d.c. 750) was writing his *Pege Gnoseos* and his *Orations against the Calumniators of the Icons* at Mar Sabas monastery, Cosmas of Jerusalem (d.c. 752), later the bishop of Maiouma, was composing the hymns which would win him the title "Hymnographer" throughout the Byzantine world, and at the century's end the *Life of Stephen the Sabaïte* (d. 794), composed in Greek by Leontius of Damascus around the year 807, depicted a Christian way of life in Syria/Palestine that was little different from life in the desert monasteries and their environs before the Islamic conquest. As a matter of fact, as Cyril Mango has written, "the most active centre of Greek culture in the 8th century lay in Palestine, notably in Jerusalem and the neighboring monasteries."¹ Constantinople and Jerusalem were still in constant colloquy with one another, and deeply implicated in one another's ecclesiastical affairs.²

But already in the last years of the eighth century, and becoming increasingly evident in the first decades of the ninth century, something new was happening in the life of the Christians in Palestine. Socio-political changes brought about a growing distance between the patriarchates of Constantinople and Jerusalem; Christians in the caliphate took on the culture of the world of Islam and adopted the Arabic language; and the pre-occupying theological

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¹ Cyril Mango, "Greek Culture in Palestine after the Arab Conquest," in G. Cavallo *et al.* (eds.), *Scrittura, Libri e Testi nelle Aree Provinciali di Bizanzio* (vol. I; Spoleto, 1991), pp. 149-150. See also R.P. Blake, "La littérature grecque en Palestine au VIII^e siècle," *Le Muséon* 78 (1965), pp. 367-380, who spoke of a "sudden awakening" (p. 369) at this time in Mar Sabas. Siméon Vailhé wrote that "the eighth and ninth centuries were the golden age of Sabaïte literature," in his article, "Les écrivains de Mar-Saba," *Échos d'Orient* 2 (1898-1899), p. 33.

² See Marie-France Auzépy, "De la Palestine à Constantinople (VIII^e-IX^e siècles): Étienne le Sabaïte et Jean Damascène," *Travaux et Mémoires* 12 (1994), pp. 183-218.

concern of the Arabic-speaking Christians was to articulate their faith in response to the religious challenge of Islam, in the very idiom of the challenge.

The purpose of the present essay is to show how the interplay between these three developments in the ninth century conspired to produce a new relationship between the Christians of the west and those of the world of Islam. It was a relationship which would become the characteristic one of the Middle Ages, set against the background of the confrontation of two worlds which shadowed one another, Greek and Latin-speaking Christendom on the one hand, and the Arabic-speaking *dār al-Islām* on the other. In short, from the western point of view, one sees here fairly graphically the passage from the cultural world of late antiquity to that of medieval times. It is the passage from a certain cultural fluency between east and west to the cultural confrontation of Christendom and the Islamic commonwealth.

I *What has Constantinople to do with Jerusalem in the Ninth Century?*

In the first quarter of the ninth century, on the basis of reports that reached the historian Theophanes (d.c. 818), it must have seemed to people in Constantinople that productive Christian life in Palestine had come to an end. Towards the conclusion of his *Chronography*, under the heading of the "Year of the World" 6305, or 805 A.D., as Theophanes reckoned it, but 812/813 in the correct reckoning, the chronographer wrote:

In this year many Christian monks and laity from Palestine and all Syria reached Cyprus, fleeing the boundless evil of the Arabs. For general anarchy had seized Syria, Egypt, Africa, and their entire empire: in villages and cities their people, cursed by God, murdered, robbed, committed adultery and acts of licentiousness, and did all sorts of things hateful to God. The revered sites in the vicinity of the holy city of Christ our God, the Anastasis, Golgotha, and others, were profaned. In the same way, the famous *lauras* of Sts. Chariton and Sabas in the desert, as well as other churches and monasteries, were devastated. Some men became martyrs; others got to Cyprus, and from there to Byzantium. The Emperor Michael and the holy patriarch Nikephoros kindly entertained them. Michael helped them in every way. He gave the men who entered the city a famous monastery, and sent a talent of gold to the monks and laymen still on Cyprus.³

It seems reasonable to link Theophanes' report of Michael I Rangabe's (811-813) gift of "a famous monastery" in Constantinople to the refugees from Palestine to the notice in the *Life of Michael the Synkellos* that when

³ Carolus De Boor (ed.), *Theophanis Chronographia* (2 vols.; Lipsiae, 1883 & 1885), vol. I, p. 499. The English translation is adapted from Harry Turtledove, *The Chronicle of Theophanes: an English Translation of anni mundi 6095-6305 (A.D. 602-813), with Introduction and Notes* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1982), p. 178.

Michael and his companions from Jerusalem arrived in the Byzantine capital in the year 813, the emperor gave them quarters in the monastery of Chora,⁴ at the site of the present-day *Kariye Camii*.⁵ There is evidence to support the suggestion that the environs of this famous monastery constituted virtually a Palestinian "quarter" in Constantinople in the ninth century,⁶ where refugee monks from Jerusalem and the Judean desert monasteries gathered to promote the interests of their see.

Trouble had been brewing in Palestine as early as the time of the emperor Constantine VI (780-797), and the caliph Hārūn ar-Rashīd (786-809); it continued through the wars of succession after the caliph's death between his sons al-Amīn (809-813) and al-Ma'mūn (813-833). Surviving reports speak of the wrack and ruin wrought by marauding "Saracen" tribesmen in Palestine, including the sack of the monastery of Mar Chariton in 788 and the massacre of twenty of the monks of Mar Sabas in the year 797.⁷ It is clear from Islamic historians as well that in the ninth century in Palestine, Beduin unrest was common, regularly issuing in destructive raids on Jerusalem and the surrounding towns and villages.⁸ Once the Abbasid revolution had consolidated its position after 750, and especially after the installment of the caliphate in the new capital city of Baghdad in the reign of the caliph al-Manṣūr (754-775), the Muslim polity turned its back on the Mediterranean world, at least culturally.⁹ Syria/Palestine, and especially Jerusalem, which had been an important cultural and religious center of the burgeoning Islamic culture for almost a century under the Umayyads, became a venerated but neglected, provincial backwater in the early Abbasid caliphate, ruled from afar by a succession of appointed emirs and governors, visited occasionally by caliphs and trusted generals sent to put down the restless Beduin, but otherwise left to its fate as a pilgrimage center for Jews, Christians, and Muslims.¹⁰ By the

⁴ See Mary B. Cunningham, *The Life of Michael the Synkellos: Text, Translation and Commentary* (Belfast Byzantine Texts and Translations, 1; Belfast: Belfast Byzantine Enterprises, 1991), pp. 62 & 63.

⁵ See P.A. Underwood, *The Kariye Djami* (4 vols.; Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1975).

⁶ See J. Gouillard, "Un 'quartier' d'émigrés palestiniens à Constantinople au IX^e siècle?" *Revue des Études Sud-Est Européennes* 7 (1969), pp. 73-76.

⁷ See "Passio SS. XX Martyrum Laurae S. Sabae," in *Acta Sanctorum Martii* (vol. III; Paris & Rome, 1865), pp. 166-178. See also Robert P. Blake, "Deux lacunae comblées dans la Passio XX Monachorum Sabaitarum," *Analecta Bollandiana* 68 (1950), pp. 27-43.

⁸ See Moshe Gil, *A History of Palestine, 634-1099* (trans. Ethel Broido; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), pp. 283-312.

⁹ See Jacob Lassner, "Some Speculative Thoughts on the Search for an Abbasid Capital," *The Muslim World* 55 (1965), pp. 135-141, 203-210; W. Montgomery Watt, *The Majesty that Was Islam: the Islamic World, 661-1100* (London: Sidgwick & Jackson, 1974); Hugh Kennedy, *The Prophet and the Age of the Caliphates: the Islamic Near East from the Sixth to the Eleventh Century* (London & New York: Longman, 1986), pp. 124-187.

¹⁰ See Abdul Aziz Duri, "Jerusalem in the Early Islamic Period, 7th-11th Centuries A.D.," in K.J. Asali (ed.), *Jerusalem in History* (Brooklyn, N.Y.: Olive Branch Press, 1990), pp. 105-129.

century's end, from 877/878 until 904/905, Jerusalem and Palestine were ruled not from Baghdad but from Egypt under the ʿTulūnids.

It is from the beginning of this period of unrest, the late eighth century through much of the ninth century, in sharp contrast to the experience of the previous century, that the only voices from Jerusalem heard in Constantinople and the west are occasional messages coming from the patriarchs. They are sometimes concerned about the heavy burdens of taxes and other financial exactions. They are concerned as well about the destruction of churches, in the early ninth century, in all probability, a new experience for the Christians of Jerusalem under the rule of Islam.¹¹ The record begins with the much discussed exchanges between Charlemagne (800-814), Hārūn ar-Rashīd, and the patriarchs of Jerusalem, Elias II (796-800) and Thomas (807-821).¹² They are principally concerned with financial support for Jerusalem Christians, with the building and rebuilding of churches, and the maintenance of the local Latin community. There is also the festering controversy over the *filioque* between the Latin monks of the Mount of Olives and the monks of Mar Sabas, which prompted an appeal on the part of Patriarch Thomas to Pope Leo III (795-816).¹³ These same concerns, financial exigency and the *filioque*, were also what prompted the mission of Michael Synkellos, the monk Job, and the brothers Theodore and Theophane Graptoi to Constantinople (and Rome, where they never arrived), at the behest of Patriarch Thomas in the year 813.¹⁴ But later in the century the patriarchs can also report the good fortune of the Christians of Jerusalem. Such was the message of Patriarch Theodosius (867-878) in the year 869 to Patriarch Ignatius of Constantinople (847-858, 867-878).¹⁵ And in the year 881 Patriarch Elias III (878-906), in addition to noting the financial disabilities borne by his flock, can also boast in his letter of appeal to the bishops of France about a Christian governor in

See especially Amikam Elad, *Medieval Jerusalem & Islamic Worship, Holy Places, Ceremonies, Pilgrimage* (Islamic History and Civilization, Studies and Texts, vol. 8; Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1995).

¹¹ See Klaus Bieberstein, "Der Gesandtenaustausch zwischen Karl dem Grossen und Hārūn ar-Rašīd und seine Bedeutung für die Kirchen Jerusalems," *Zeitschrift des Deutschen Palästina-Vereins* 109 (1993), pp. 151-173. The author argues that the destructions usually attributed to the Persians in 614 and to the Muslims at the conquest, were actually carried out during this period, from the 780's to the reign of al-Ma'mūn.

¹² For a full discussion, including a rich bibliography of earlier scholarship, see now Michael Borgolte, *Der Gesandtenaustausch der Karolinger mit den Abbasiden und mit den Patriarchen von Jerusalem* (Münchener Beiträge zur Mediävistik und Renaissance-Forschung, 25; München: Bei der Arbores Gesellschaft, 1976). See also P.D. King, *Charlemagne: Translated Sources* (P.D. King (pub.); Lancaster: University of Lancaster, 1987), pp. 68-69.

¹³ See Michael Borgolte, "Papst Leo III, Karl der Grosse und der Filioque Streit von Jerusalem," *Byzantina* 10 (1980), pp. 403-427. See also K. Schmid, "Aachen und Jerusalem: ein Beitrag zur historischen Personenforschung der Karolingerzeit," in K. Hauck (ed.), *Das Einhardkrenz* (Göttingen, 1974), pp. 122-142.

¹⁴ See Cunningham, *The Life of Michael Synkellos*, pp. 9-13, 142-143.

¹⁵ See J.D. Mansi, *Sacrorum Conciliorum Nova et Amplissima Collectio* (vol. XVI; Venice, 1771), cols. 25-27.

Ramla, and of the permission he had received to renovate damaged buildings.¹⁶

Letters of appeal and emissaries from the patriarch seeking help in the west are just about all one reliably hears of the church of Jerusalem in the historical sources from the first decades of the ninth century until the military incursions of the Byzantines into the territories of the Oriental Patriarchs in the second half of the tenth century. During this period the Abbasid defense of the frontier between Byzantium and the world of Islam was well organized and sophisticated.¹⁷ It only broke down in the second half of the tenth century, when Islamic military power was unable to stop the incursions into Syria of the emperors Nicephorus Phocas (963-969) and John Tzimisce (969-976).¹⁸ Thereafter, Antioch and its environs were once more in Byzantine hands, from 969 until the city was taken by the Turks in 1084/1085. But it was not until the reign of Emperor Constantine IX Monomachus (1042-1055) in the eleventh century that one hears of any effective Byzantine power being once again exercised in the ecclesiastical affairs of Jerusalem. At that time the emperor acceded to requests coming from the Christian inhabitants of the city, by leave of the local emir, to build a wall around the Christian quarter of Jerusalem, and to rebuild the church of the Anastasis, which had been destroyed in 1009 at the order of the Fatimid caliph al-Ḥākim bi 'Amr Allāh (996-1021).¹⁹ One of the emperor's conditions was a renewed voice in the ecclesiastical affairs of Jerusalem.

In connection with the Palestinian refugees in Constantinople in the ninth century, one thinks perhaps the most immediately of the struggles over iconoclasm there in the first half of the century, as the mention of the names of Michael Synkellos and his companions, Theodore and Theophane Graptoi, suggests.²⁰ One thinks too of the letters addressed by Theodore of Stoudios

¹⁶ See Léopold Delisle (ed.), *Recueil des historiens des Gaules et de la France* (vol. IX; Paris, 1874), pp. 294-296.

¹⁷ See J.F. Haldon & H. Kennedy, "The Arab-Byzantine Frontier in the Eighth and Ninth Centuries: Military Organisation and Society in the Borderlands," *Recueil des Travaux de l'Institut d'Études Byzantines* (vol. XIX; Beograd, 1980), p. 106.

¹⁸ Emperor John Tzimisce made his way well into Palestine in 975, but he did not gain Jerusalem. See Gustave Schlumberger, *L'épopée byzantine à la fin du dixième siècle* (vol. I; Paris, 1896), pp. 281-308; Ernest Honigmann, *Die Ostgrenze des Byzantinischen Reiches von 363-1071 nach griechischen, arabischen, syrischen und armenischen Quellen* (Byzance et les arabes, A.A. Vasiliev (ed.), tome III; Bruxelles: Éditions de l'Institut de Philologie et d'Histoire Orientales, 1935), pp. 99-101. See also P.E. Walker, "The 'Crusade' of John Tzimisce in the Light of New Arabic Evidence," *Byzantion* 47 (1977), pp. 301-327.

¹⁹ The Church of the Anastasis had actually been burned earlier, around the year 966, by the local governor of Jerusalem in a dispute with the patriarch. At that time a wealthy "Jacobite" in the entourage of the Turkish military leader Alptakin saw to the repairs. See I. Kratchkovsky & A. Vasiliev, "Histoire de Yahya-ibn-Sa'īd d'Antioche, continuateur d Sa'īd-ibn-Bitriq," in *Patrologia Orientalis* 18 (Paris, 1924), I, p. 708. See also M. Canard, "La destruction de l'église de la resurrection," *Byzantion* 35 (1965), pp. 16-43.

²⁰ See Ihor Ševcenko, "Hagiography of the Iconoclast Period," in A. Bryer & J. Herrin (eds.), *Iconoclasm* (Birmingham, 1977), pp. 112-118; S. Vailhé, "Saint Michel le syncelle et les

(759-826) to the patriarchs of Alexandria, Antioch and Jerusalem,²¹ as well as to the monasteries of Mar Sabas, Theodosius, Chariton, and Euthymius,²² seeking support for his iconodule policies. But there were also other issues. One hears, for example, of emigrés from Palestine who made their way to Byzantium and made their mark there. A case in point is that of St. Anthony the Younger, who was born in a village named Phossaton near Jerusalem in 785, but who died as a monk in Byzantium in 865, after a brief career in the service of the emperor.²³ There are reports of refugee monks from the Holy Land monasteries in western Asia Minor in the ninth century,²⁴ but there is little or no news in these reports of the church they left behind in the world of Islam.

To be sure there are other reports which do suggest contact between Constantinople and Jerusalem in this period, but they are either one-way missives or documents of doubtful authenticity. For example, one knows that in the year 867 Patriarch Photius (858-867; 878-886) addressed a letter to the Oriental Patriarchs in connection with the *filioque* controversy,²⁵ but there is no evidence of a reply. Again, there are reports of the participation of the legates of these same patriarchs in the council of Constantinople in 869-870,²⁶ but no evidence that they did not come from the local emigré community rather than immediately from Palestine, as happened at the council of 787,

deux frères Grapti, saint Théodore et saint Théophane," *Revue de l'Orient Chrétien* 9 (1901), pp. 313-332, 610-642; J. Featherstone, "Theophane of Caesarea, Encomium of Theodore Graptos," *Analecta Bollandiana* 98 (1980), pp. 93-150.

²¹ See *PG*, vol. 99, cols. 1155-1164. A note at the end of the letter to Alexandria says that an identical letter was sent to Antioch (col. 1160). Only the letter to Jerusalem mentions the name of the Patriarch, Theodorus (col. 1159), but there was no patriarch of that name in Jerusalem in the ninth century. The patriarch of Jerusalem may have responded. There is a remark in the *Life of Michael the Synkellos* about Theodore of Stoudios' letter. It says, "For this reason, they composed a letter to the aforesaid patriarch or rather 'factionarch' Theodotus (of Constantinople, 815-821) and to the ruler Leo, both refuting them and admonishing them to turn away from the foul heresy of the burners of icons." Cunningham, *The Life of Michael the Synkellos*, p. 39. If Patriarch Thomas of Jerusalem (807-821) did respond to Theodore of Stoudios' request, it had nothing to do with Michael Synkellos' mission to Constantinople. He arrived there before the recrudescence of iconoclasm in the reign of Leo V (813-820). See n. 14 above.

²² See *PG*, vol. 99, cols. 1163-1174. Only the letters to Mar Sabas and Chariton are published. At the end of them there is the notice that the same letter has been sent to the monasteries of Theodosius and Euthymius respectively.

²³ See F. Halkin, "Saint Antoine le jeune et Pétronas le vainqueur des arabes en 863," *Analecta Bollandiana* 62 (1944), pp. 187-225.

²⁴ See Rosemary Morris, *Monks and Laymen in Byzantium, 843-1118* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), pp. 22 & 34.

²⁵ See V. Grumel, *Le Patriarcat byzantin; les registes des actes du patriarcat de Constantinople* (2 vols.; Paris, 1932-1936), vol. I, pp. 88-89; Francis Dvornik, *The Photian Schism, History and Legend* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1948), p. 119.

²⁶ See Dvornik, *The Photian Schism*, p. 193; J.M. Hussey, *The Orthodox Church in the Byzantine Empire* (Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1986), p. 80.

just about a century earlier.²⁷ There is the text of the letter which the three patriarchs, Christopher of Alexandria (817-849), Job of Antioch (814-845), and Basil of Jerusalem (821-839) are reported to have sent to Emperor Theophilus (829-842) condemning his iconoclastic policies.²⁸ The letter is said to have been the product of a synod, attended by the patriarchs or their representatives, and numerous other persons, held at Jerusalem, in the Church of the Resurrection, in April of the year 836. In the form in which the letter has survived, expressing the longing on the part of the patriarchs for the return of Byzantine rule, it invites doubts about its authenticity.²⁹ One wonders if such an account of the opposition of the Oriental Patriarchs to iconoclasm was not composed completely within the Greek-speaking realms of the emperor, perhaps at the hands of emigré monks, having as its kernel of fact merely the known support of the icons within the Oriental patriarchates at the time.³⁰ Finally, there is the *Life of Theodore of Edessa*, with its report of Theodore's visit to Constantinople in the reign of Emperor Michael III (842-867), before the retirement of Empress Theodora, so at some point between 850 and 856. But this text too bears every sign of being a hagiographical romance. It may also have been the work of emigré Palestinian monks in Constantinople.³¹ In other words, iconodule propagandists seem to have been responsible for much of the "news" of Jerusalem in Constantinople in the first half of the ninth century, and they seem to have fabricated a good bit of it.

²⁷ In a letter to the monk Arsenius, Theodore of Stoudios registered his awareness that the "legates" of the Oriental Patriarchs at the council of 787 came from the emigré community in Constantinople, and had no real contact with the sees they represented. See P. Henry, "Initial Eastern Assessments of the Seventh Occumenical Council," *Journal of Theological Studies* 25 (1974), p. 77.

²⁸ See L. Duchesne, "L'Iconographie byzantine dans un document grec du IX^e siècle," *Roma e l'Oriente* 5 (1912-1913), pp. 222-239, 273-285, 349-366.

²⁹ See A. Vasiliev, "The Life of St. Theodore of Edessa," *Byzantion* 16 (1942-1943), pp. 216-225; H.G. Beck, *Kirche und theologische Literatur* (München, 1959), p. 496.

³⁰ See the remark of I. Ševcenko, "Constantinople Viewed from the Eastern Provinces in the Middle Byzantine Period," *Harvard Ukrainian Studies* 3-4 (1979-1980), p. 735, n. 36, reprinted in the author's *Ideology, Letters and Culture in the Byzantine World* (London: Variorum Reprints, 1982), no. VI. See especially the detailed analysis of the letter in Paul Speck, *Ich Bin's Nicht, Kaiser Konstantin Ist Es Gewesen; die Legenden vom Einfluss des Teufels, des Juden und des Moslem auf den Ikonoklasmus* (Bonn: Dr. Rudolf Habelt GmbH, 1990), pp. 449-534. On a related issue, see also Paul Speck, "Was für Bilder eigentlich? neue Überlegungen zu dem Bilderedikt des Kalifen Yazid," *Le Muséon* 109 (1996), pp. 267-278.

³¹ The *Vita* has survived in Greek, in a manuscript dated to the year 1023, which belonged originally to the Georgian monastery, Iviron, on Mt. Athos. See I. Pomialovskii, *Žitie izhe vo sviatykh itca našego Feodora Archiepiskopa Edesskago* (St. Petersburg, 1892), pp. 1-220. It has also survived in Arabic, in a thirteenth-century Egyptian manuscript, now in the Bibliothèque Nationale de Paris. See G. Troupeau, *Catalogue des manuscrits arabes; première partie, manuscrits chrétiens* (Paris: Bibliothèque Nationale, 1972), MS 147, pp. 110-113, cf. p. 112, no. 12. Another Arabic MS, of unknown provenance, and uncertain date, has also been reported to contain

Meanwhile, within the territories of the Oriental Patriarchs there is a similar scarcity of information about Byzantium in the ninth and tenth centuries. The most dramatic testimony to this state of affairs is to be found in the *Annals* of Patriarch Eutychius of Alexandria (877-940). An examination of his account of the emperors and patriarchs of Constantinople in the ninth century reveals his uncertainty about the sequence of their reigns.³² It comes as no surprise, therefore, to find him saying:

The names of the patriarchs of Constantinople have not reached me since Theodoros died (Theodoros I, 677-679), until I have written this book. Likewise, in regard to the patriarchs of Rome, from the time of Agabius (i.e., Agatho, 678-691), patriarch of Rome, the names of the patriarchs of Rome and reports of them have not reached me.³³

the *Vita*. See Yiannis Meimaris & Adel Selim, "An Arabic Version of the Life of St. Theodore of Edessa (ar-Raha) the Sabaite," *Graeco-Arabica* 2 (1983), pp. 113-117. A.A. Vasiliev, while agreeing that there are many exaggerations and legendary features in the *Vita*, nevertheless argued for the basic historicity of Theodore of Edessa, and of the other events recounted in the narrative. See A. Vasiliev, "The Life of St. Theodore of Edessa," *Byzantion* 16 (1942-1943), pp. 165-225. Paulus Peeters, on the contrary, thought that the whole composition was a piece of hagiographical fiction, and Theodore of Edessa was no more than a literary double for Theodore Abū Qurrah. See P. Peeters, "La passion de s. Michel le sabaïte," *Anacleta Bollandiana* 48 (1930), pp. 65-98. J. Gouillard showed that the works usually ascribed to Theodore of Edessa in the manuscript tradition, a dogmatic catechesis, an ascetical instruction, and a spiritual "century," are in fact only lightly reworked texts of other authors. See J. Gouillard, "Supercherries et méprises littéraires; l'oeuvre de saint Théodore d'Édesse," *Revue des Études Byzantines* 5 (1947), pp. 137-157. Armand Abel then argued that the work is a piece of hagiographical fiction with an apologetical dimension. He concludes that it was written in Mar Sabas monastery in the tenth century as part of a propaganda campaign to go along with the Byzantine reconquest of Antioch and its environs. See A. Abel, "La portée apologetique de la 'vie' de st. Théodore d'Édesse," *Byzantinoslavica* 10 (1949), pp. 229-240. Finally, Alexander Kazhdan has pointed out the narrative coincidences, and even the similarity in language, between the *Life of Theodore of Edessa* and the story of Barlaam and Ioasaph, again highlighting the connection with Mar Sabas monastery. See Alexander Kazhdan, "Where, When and by Whom Was the Greek Barlaam and Ioasaph Not Written," in W. Will & J. Heinrichs (eds.), *Zu Alexander d.Gr.; Festschrift G. Wirth zum 60. Geburtstag am 9.12.86* (vol. II; Amsterdam: Verlag Adolf M. Hakkert, 1988), pp. 1187-1209. The present writer's opinion is that the *Vita* is indeed hagiographical fiction, as Peeters first argued, and that it was first composed in Constantinople, in Greek, probably with the help of refugee monks from Palestine, after the triumph of Orthodoxy, and probably in the mid-tenth century. The principal reason for this conclusion is the high place in Theodore's sermons accorded to the icons and their veneration, with explicit references to the council of 787.

³² See Sidney H. Griffith, "Eutychius of Alexandria on the Emperor Theophilus and Iconoclasm in Byzantium: a Tenth Century Moment in Christian Apologetics in Arabic," *Byzantion* 52 (1982), pp. 168-174, available also in S.H. Griffith, *Arabic in the Monasteries of Ninth-Century Palestine* (Alsershot, Hampshire: Variorum, 1992), no. IV.

³³ Louis Cheikho *et al.* (eds.), *Eutychii Patriarchae Alexandrini Annales* (CSCO, vols. 50 & 51; Beirut & Paris, 1906 & 1909), vol. 51, p. 49. 'The continuator of Eutychius' *Annales*, Yahyā ibn Sa'īd ibn Yahyā al-Anṭākī (d.c. 1066) says that the names of the bishops of Rome were unknown "due to the lack of news and the far distance of their country." I. Kratchkovsky & A. Vasiliev, "Histoire de Yahya," I, p. 708.

Similarly, Eutychius knows nothing of such major events in Byzantium as the council of 787, Nicea II, nor of the controversies surrounding Patriarch Photius of Constantinople and the *filioque* issue. Indeed, in regard to this latter controversy one can find no discussion of it in any text in Syriac or Arabic from the time before the Crusades.³⁴ But closer to his own time, Eutychius is somewhat better informed. He closes his chronicle with the following notice:

In the year 326 (i.e., 937 A.D.) a gratifying peace came about between the Byzantines (and the Muslims). And in that year, Theofilaks (Theophylaktos, 933-956), patriarch of the city of Constantinople, sent a messenger to the patriarchs of Alexandria and Antioch asking them to mention his name in their prayers and in their liturgies because this had been cut off since the era of the Umayyads. They complied with him in this.³⁵

Here we have one of the very few records of the arrival at its destination of any message coming from Constantinople to the Oriental Patriarchs in the ninth or tenth centuries. The same record also documents what the historian had already come to suspect; from the mid-eighth century onwards, i.e., from the end of the Umayyad era, while there was a steady stream of Christian refugees from the world of Islam to Byzantium and Constantinople, there is little or no notice in the sources of any traffic in the opposite direction. So, like Eutychius in Alexandria, his fellow "Melkite," and contemporary historian, Agapius, or Maḥbūb ibn Qusṭanṭīn (d. after 941), the bishop of Manbij (Hieropolis) in former Byzantine Syria, had a similar problem with a lack of information about civil or ecclesiastical affairs in Byzantium reaching back well into the seventh century.³⁶ And in this isolation, it is interesting to notice that just as the monks and patriarchs of Constantinople addressed letters about the icons that never arrived to the Oriental Patriarchs, so, according to Eutychius, Patriarch Sophronius I of Alexandria (836-859) wrote a treatise in defense of the practice of venerating icons and sent it to Emperor Theophilus, who, so Eutychius claims, promptly repented of his iconoclastic policies.³⁷

³⁴ See Khalil Samir, "Une Allusion au filioque dans la 'Réfutation des Chrétiens' de 'Abd al-Jabbār (m. 1025)," *Studi Albanologici Balcanici, Bizantine e Orientali in onore di Giuseppe Valentini S.J.* (Studi Albanesi, Studi e Testi, VI; Firenze: Leo S. Olschki Editore, 1986), p. 365.

³⁵ Cheikho, *Eutychii Patriarchae Annales*, vol. 51, pp. 87-88. Yahyā al-Anṭākī specifies that a messenger came from Theophylaktos with letters for patriarchs Eutychius of Alexandria (933-940), Theodosius of Antioch (936-943), and Christodoulos of Jerusalem (937-951). See Kratchkovsky & Vasiliev, "Histoire de Yahya," pp. 710-711.

³⁶ See I. Cheikho, *Agapius Episcopus Mabbugensis Historia Universalis* (CSCO, vol. 65; Paris, 1912); A. Vasiliev, "Kitāb al-Unvan, histoire universelle écrite par Agapius (Mahboub) de Menbidj," *Patrologia Orientalis* 5 (1910), pp. 557-692; 7 (1911), pp. 457-491; 8 (1912), pp. 397-550. See also Griffith, "Eutychius of Alexandria on the Emperor Theophilus," pp. 172-173.

³⁷ See Cheikho, *Eutychii Patriarchae Annales*, vol. 51, pp. 63-64. See also Griffith, "Eutychius of Alexandria on the Emperor Theophilus," pp. 176-178.

In Arabic sources there is the record of a plan suggested to the *vizir* of the caliph al-Muqtadir (912-932), one 'Alī ibn 'Isā, according to which the patriarchs of Antioch and Jerusalem would be required to write a letter to the Byzantine emperor to complain about the way in which Muslim prisoners were being treated in Constantinople, and the patriarchs would then be held responsible for the amelioration of the conditions of their confinement. According to the report, the unnamed patriarchs actually wrote the letter, threatening the emperor with excommunication for unchristian behavior, and it was sent by a patriarchal courier, accompanied by a Muslim, to Constantinople, where, the text says, it actually had the good effect of bringing about improvements in the ways in which the prisoners were treated.³⁸ Although there is some evidence that this letter actually arrived in Constantinople, and received a reply from Patriarch Nicholas Mysticus (901-907, 912-925),³⁹ it cannot serve as evidence of any regular correspondence between the oriental patriarchs and the see of Constantinople in the early tenth century.

Even the pilgrims who came from Byzantium and the west to the Holy Land in the ninth and tenth centuries did not help to relieve the relative isolation between the patriarchates. As John Wilkinson has put it in his study of western pilgrimage to the Holy Land prior to the Crusades, "Despite occasional expressions of gratitude for courtesy and kindness, most of our pilgrims appear to regard local people with curiosity and little more."⁴⁰ The Constantinopolitan monk Epiphanius, for example, whose narrative was composed in its final form around the turn of the ninth century, passed by the monasteries of Mar Sabas and Mar Chariton on his pilgrimage. He mentions them, but he gives no hint of the indigenous Christian monasticism thriving there at that very time. He was interested in the *Loca Sancta* and not in the monastic communities of Palestine.⁴¹ Even the Calabrian, St. Elias the Younger (823-903), who, after his capture by Arabs made his way to Jerusalem as a pilgrim in the time of Patriarch Elias III (878-906), and received the monastic habit from him, and who is said to have engaged in discussions about reli-

³⁸ See Henri Grégoire & Marius Canard (eds.), *Les Relations politiques de Byzance et des arabes à l'époque de la dynastie macédonienne* (Byzance et les arabes, A.A. Vasiliev (ed.), vol. II, part 2, Extraits des Sources Arabes, M. Canard (trans.); Bruxelles: Éditions de l'Institut de Philologie et d'Histoire Orientales et Slaves, 1950), pp. 285-291.

³⁹ See Romilly J.H. Jenkins, "The Emperor Alexander and the Saracen Prisoners," in *Studi Bizantini e Neelleniki* 7 (1953), "Atti dell VIII Congresso Internazionale di Studi Bizantini," pp. 393, reprinted in the author's *Studies on Byzantine History of the 9th and 10th Centuries* (London: Variorum Reprints, 1970), no. XV.

⁴⁰ John Wilkinson, *Jerusalem Pilgrims Before the Crusades* (Warminster: Aris & Phillips, 1977), p. 32.

⁴¹ See H. Donner, "Die Palästinabeschreibung des Epiphanius Monachus Hagiopolita," *Zeitschrift des deutschen Palästina-Vereins* 87 (1971), p. 71.

gion with the local Muslims, did not leave his biographer with much information about the local church.⁴² Only Bernard the Monk, a pilgrim from the Latin west around the year 870, remarks on the local conditions. He says,

Now I must tell you how Christians in Jerusalem and Egypt can keep God's law. Relations between the Christians and pagans are excellent. Thus, say I were travelling, and the camel or donkey which your humble servant was riding died on the way, and I left all my belongings there without any one to look after them, and went off to the city to fetch another animal. I would find everything unharmed when I came back. Good relations means as much as that. But any traveller who stays in a city, or goes on a journey by sea or any other way is found by night or day without a paper or a stamp issued by one of the kings or princes of that country, is sent to prison there and then until such time as he can explain that he is not a spy.⁴³

Bernard's narrative depicts a Palestine in the last third of the ninth century, where Christians live more or less in peace and harmony with those whom he calls "pagans," but who are certainly the Muslims. There is only some suspicion of the undocumented foreigner to register, even of the pilgrim, lest he should be a spy. This impression of law and order is in stark contrast to reports from the beginning of the century in Byzantine sources. We have already quoted the passage from the historian Theophanes who speaks of the "boundless evil of the Arabs," who, "cursed by God . . . did all sorts of things hateful to God"⁴⁴ in the year 812/813. But Bernard's report is consistent with the tenor of the letters of Patriarch Theodosius of Jerusalem to Patriarch Ignatius of Constantinople in 869, and of Patriarch Elias III to the French bishops in 881.⁴⁵

In Byzantium in the ninth century, except for several iconodule propagandists, when people thought of the world of Islam beyond the battle lines in Asia Minor their thoughts went no longer to Syria/Palestine, nor to Jerusalem nor to Damascus, but to Baghdad. Like the emperor Theophilus (829-842) many were beguiled by the legendary splendor of the caliph Hārūn ar-Rashīd (786-809), although there were almost continuous hostilities between Byzantines and Arabs throughout the century.⁴⁶ It was said that Theophilus even built a palace in the Constantinopolitan suburb of Bryas, on the Asian shore of the Sea of Marmara just southeast of Chalcedon, on the model of the caliph's palace in Baghdad, following the description of his erstwhile tutor and later

⁴² See G. Rossi Taibbi (ed.), *Vita de Sant' Elia il Giovane* (Palermo, 1962).

⁴³ Wilkinson, *Jerusalem Pilgrims*, p. 145.

⁴⁴ See n. 3 above.

⁴⁵ See nn. 15 & 16 above.

⁴⁶ See H. Grégoire et al., *La Dynastie d'Amorium (820-867)* (A.A. Vasiliev (ed.), *Byzance et les arabes*, vol. I; Bruxelles: Éditions de l'Institut de Philologie et d'Histoire Orientales, 1935). See also M. Canard, "Les relations politiques et sociales entre Byzance et les Arabes," *Dumbarton Oaks Papers* 18 (1964), pp. 35-56.

patriarch, John VII Grammatikos (837-843, d. 867), who had visited Baghdad on a diplomatic mission in the reign of caliph al-Ma'mūn (813-833).⁴⁷ There are also reports that at mid-century, in the reign of the emperor Michael III (842-867), a young, twenty-four year old scholar called Constantine found himself at the court of the caliph al-Mutawakkil (847-861), where he engaged in a debate about religion with a number of Muslims. The account of it is included in his biography, which goes on, of course, to tell of his later entry into the monastic life under the name Cyril when he returned to Byzantium, and of how he and his brother Methodius went on to become the apostles of the Slavs.⁴⁸ While there are a number of problems with this perhaps legendary report about Constantine, it is nevertheless intriguing to have the account of the debate with the Muslims; it parallels in interesting ways the accounts of debates between Christians and Muslims in Syriac and Arabic sources of the same period and later.⁴⁹ Similarly, it shares a number of features in common with other Greek polemical texts of the ninth century, works such as the accounts of the passion of the forty-two martyrs of Amorium, which include a debate about religion between martyr and caliph,⁵⁰ and the refutations of Islam by Niketos Byzantios.⁵¹

Another visitor to the Muslims in a diplomatic capacity at mid-century was none other than the future patriarch Photios, although it is not clear that his mission in fact carried him as far as Baghdad, as is sometimes claimed.⁵² After the middle of the ninth century the fortunes of the Abbasid caliphs began to wane, and one hears no more of such high-profile Byzantine visitors to the courts of Baghdad or Samarra. But there is a story in the world of Islam about a Christian visitor from the caliph's court to Byzantium.

⁴⁷ See Warren Treadgold, *The Byzantine Revival, 740-842* (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 1988), pp. 294-295. See also J.B. Bury, "The Embassy of John the Grammarian," *English Historical Review* 24 (1909), pp. 296-299.

⁴⁸ See Francis Dvornik, *Les légendes de Constantin et de Methode, vues de Byzance* (Prague: Commissionnaire Orbis 1933), pp. 85-111; *idem*, "The Embassies of Constantine-Cyril and Photius to the Arabs," in *To Honor Roman Jakobson* (The Hague/Paris Mouton, 1967), pp. 569-576. See also C.H.M. Versteegh, "Die Mission des Kyrillos im Lichte der arabo-byzantinischen Beziehungen," *Zeitschrift der Deutschen Morgenländischen Gesellschaft* 129 (1979), pp. 233-262.

⁴⁹ See Sidney H. Griffith, "The Monk in the Emir's *Majlis*: Reflections on a Popular Genre of Christian Literary Apologetics in Arabic in the Early Islamic Period," soon to appear in a volume of essays on the institution of the *Majlis* in the medieval world of Islam, to be published under the editorship of Hava Lazarus Yafeh and others.

⁵⁰ See the text in J. Bollandus *et al.* (eds.), *Acta Sanctorum* (Martii Tomus Primus; Paris & Rome, 1865), pp. 880-467; V. Vasiliev & P. Nikitin (eds.), *Skazaniia o 42 Amorijskich Mucenikach* (St. Pétersbourg, 1905). See also A.P. Kazhdan, "Hagiographical Notes," *Byzantion* 56 (1986), pp. 151-160.

⁵¹ See the texts in *PG*, vol. CV, cols. 669-842.

⁵² See Paul Lemerle, *Byzantine Humanism, the First Phase; Notes and Remarks on Education and Culture in Byzantium from its Origins to the 10th Century* (trans. Helen Lindsay & Ann Moffatt, Byzantina Australiensia, 3; Canberra Australian Association for Byzantine Studies, 1986), pp. 35-41.

Some sources say that Ḥunayn ibn Ishāq (d. 877), the famed "Nestorian" physician, travelled to the "land of the Romans (*bilād ar-Rūm*)," and sojourned there to search out Greek books.⁵³ And some modern scholars have gone further, to propose that while he was there, Ḥunayn was influenced by the iconoclasts, a circumstance which in their view would explain an incident involving the court physician in later years when he allegedly desecrated an icon of the virgin Mary.⁵⁴ However, the trouble here is that there are serious problems both with the sources of Ḥunayn's biography and with the precise location of the *bilād ar-Rūm* he is said to have visited.⁵⁵ There is no report that Ḥunayn came home with news of ecclesiastical affairs in Byzantium.

Enough has been said to make the point that in the ninth century the attention of Byzantium was distracted from Syria/Palestine to Baghdad. Constantinople had in fact little to do with Jerusalem in this period, even in ecclesiastical affairs. We have seen how tenuous were the connections between the patriarchs of east and west during this time, limited for the most part to appeals for financial aid on the part of bishops living *in partibus infidelium*. And in Jerusalem in the ninth century it seems that Constantinople was no longer an effective pole of reference even in ecclesiastical affairs. For, as Cyril Mango has again so sharply put it, "in the course of the 9th century the practice of Greek all but died out in Palestine and Syria."⁵⁶

What happened was that as the local ties with Byzantium faded in the ninth century, and the Arabicization and Islamicization of the conquered territories of the caliphate simultaneously came to term, the distinctive culture of the world of Islam achieved its classical identity. This development, as much as any other, played a significant role in the alienation of the churches of the Oriental Patriarchates from the churches of Rome and Constantinople; the Oriental Christians were inculturated into the Islamic commonwealth.⁵⁷ For, as Albert Hourani has so evocatively put it,

By the third and fourth Islamic centuries (the ninth or tenth century A.D.) something which was recognizably an "Islamic world" had emerged. A traveller around the world would have been able to tell, by what he saw and heard, whether a land was ruled and peopled by Muslims. . . . By the tenth century, then, men and women in the Near East and the Maghrib lived in

⁵³ August Müller, *Ibn Abī Useibia, 'Uyūn al-Anbā' fī Tabaqāt al-Tibbā* (2 vols. in 1; Königsberg, 1884), vol. II, p. 187; J. Lippert, *Ibn al-Qifṭī's Ta'riḥ al-Hukamā'* (Leipzig, 1903), p. 174.

⁵⁴ On this incident see B. Hemmerdinger, "Ḥunayn ibn Ishāq et l'iconoclasme byzantin," in *Actes du XIIe congrès international d'études byzantines* (Belgrade, 1964), vol. II, pp. 467-469; G. Strohmaier, "Ḥunayn ibn Ishāq und die Bilder," *Klio* 43-45 (1965), pp. 525-533.

⁵⁵ See G. Strohmaier "Ḥunayn b. Ishāq al-'Ibādī," *Encyclopedia of Islam*, 2nd ed., vol. II, pp. 578-581.

⁵⁶ Mango, "Greek Culture in Palestine," p. 151.

⁵⁷ See Garth Fowden, *Empire to Commonwealth; Consequences of Monotheism in Late Antiquity* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993).

a universe which was defined in terms of Islam. . . . Time was marked by the five daily prayers, the weekly sermon in the mosque, the annual fast in the month of Ramadan and the pilgrimage to Mecca, and the Muslim calendar.⁵⁸

Christians living in this world of Islam accommodated themselves to its habits, and first among them was the use of the Arabic language. Eventually all of the Christian communities took this step, including those whose liturgical and patristic heritage was Syriac or Coptic. But those who were loyal to the orthodoxy of Byzantium, for whom Greek was the *lingua sacra*, were the first to adopt Arabic as an ecclesiastical language. This is a major part of the story of the formation of the "Melkite" identity in the world of Islam. One of the conditions which hastened this development was precisely the growing distance between Constantinople and Jerusalem in the late eighth and ninth centuries, both socially and culturally.

II *Arabic as an Ecclesiastical Language in Palestine*

Although Greek was always the dominant language of the ecclesiastical establishment in the patriarchate of Jerusalem, it is clear from the surviving evidence that churchmen there also made use of the local language of the indigenous Christians, Christian Palestinian Aramaic, sometimes called Palestinian Syriac. While it shares many features with Syriac, most recognizably its script, one must emphasize that it is a different language, as recent studies have clearly shown.⁵⁹ It flourished as a spoken language at least from the fourth through the eighth centuries, with a distinctive, if borrowed script of its own from the fifth century onward. In all probability, it was the monastic establishment in Palestine which produced the 110 manuscripts in this language which are known to have survived to modern times; 83 of them come from the period between the sixth and eighth centuries.⁶⁰ They are almost all translations from Greek; there seem to be no original compositions among them. Many of them are liturgical in character, and they are uniformly "Chalcedonian" in their theological persuasion. This latter fact has prompted one scholar recently to propose that one simply call the language "Melkite Aramaic."⁶¹ It was the language in which the monks communicated with the

⁵⁸ Albert Hourani, *A History of the Arab Peoples* (New York: Warner Books, 1992), pp. 54-57.

⁵⁹ See Moshé Bar-Asher, "Le Syro-palestinien-études grammaticales," *Journal Asiatique* 276 (1988), pp. 27-59; Christa Müller-Kessler, "Die Überlieferungsstufen des christlich-palästinischen Aramäisch," in W. Dirm & A. Falaturi (eds.) *XXIV, deutscher Orientalistentag, vom 26. bis 30. September 1988 in Köln; ausgewählte Vorträge* (Zeitschrift der deutschen morgenländischen Gesellschaft, supplement, VIII; Stuttgart: Franz Steiner, 1990), pp. 55-60.

⁶⁰ See Bar-Asher, "Le Syro-palestinien," p. 33.

⁶¹ See Alain Desreumaux, "La Naissance d'une nouvelle écriture araméenne à l'époque byzantine," *Semitica* 37 (1987), p. 107.

indigenous Christians in the rural areas, and with the non-Greek speakers in the towns and cities in the patriarchate of Jerusalem, the Judean desert, Transjordan, and western Galilee.

After the Islamic conquest, and particularly from the second half of the eighth century, when the distinctive culture of the world of Islam was beginning to come into its first flowering in the early Abbasid era, Arabic began to displace Christian Palestinian Aramaic as the language of the indigenous Christians in Palestine.⁶² But unlike the local Aramaic dialect, which was never more than the language of the native inhabitants of the Jerusalem area and parts of Transjordan, Arabic was the language of a burgeoning new commonwealth, indeed the carrier of a vibrant new culture. It was in due course to carry the Byzantine Orthodox Christians of Jerusalem, Antioch and Alexandria off into a whole new world, in which they were to acquire a distinctive identity as the "Melkite" church. The use of the Arabic language was in fact one of the identifying characteristics of this Christian denomination.⁶³ While it did not entirely eclipse Greek, especially in the liturgy,⁶⁴ it is notable that from the ninth century onward one is hardpressed to name many compositions of any significance in Greek to come from Palestine.⁶⁵

⁶² See Sidney H. Griffith, "From Aramaic to Arabic; the Languages of the Monasteries of Palestine in the Byzantine and Early Islamic Periods," a paper delivered at the symposium on "Palestine and Transjordan before Islam," Dumbarton Oaks, Washington, D.C., 28-30 April 1995, to be published with the symposium proceedings in a forthcoming issue of *Dumbarton Oaks Papers*.

⁶³ See Sidney H. Griffith, "Melkites in the Umayyad Era: the Making of a Christian Identity in the World of Islam," to be published in the proceedings of the fourth workshop of the Late Antiquity and Early Islam Project, "Patterns of Communal Identity in the Late Antique and Early Islamic Near East," London, The Wellcome Trust, 5-7 May 1994.

⁶⁴ See Joseph Nasrallah, "La liturgie des Patriarcats melchites de 969 à 1300," *Oriens Christianus* 71 (1987), pp. 156-181.

⁶⁵ The only known candidates for texts composed in Greek in Palestine in the ninth century are the legendary life of St. Theodore of Edessa, said to have been composed by Basil of Emesa shortly after Theodore's death c. 860, and the letter of the three Oriental Patriarchs to the emperor Theophilus, said to have been composed at a synod in Jerusalem at Eastertime in 836. Both of them are in all likelihood works composed in iconodule circles in Constantinople, sometime after the restoration of Orthodoxy in 843, and perhaps as late as the second half of the tenth century, when the military success of Nicephorus Phocas and John Tzimiskes brought Byzantine power back to the territory of the patriarchate of Antioch. See nn. 18, 28, 29, 30, & 31 above. The Greek version of the fable of *Barlaam and Joasaph*, often attributed to John of Damascus, is almost certainly not his work. But it does seem to belong to the Palestinian milieu of the ninth century; manuscripts regularly attribute it to John the Sabaïte, and it has a number of features in common with the *Life of Theodore of Edessa*. It has also been transmitted in a milieu where Greek, Georgian and Arabic intermingle, as in Palestine. See Alexander Kazhdan, "Where, When and by Whom was the Greek Barlaam and Joasaph Not Written," in W. Will & J. Heinrichs (eds.), *Zu Alexander d.Gr.; Festschrift G. Wirth, zum 60. Geburtstag am 9.12.86* (vol. II; Amsterdam: Verlag Adolf M. Hakkert, 1988), pp. 1187-1209. If it was the work of a Sabaïte monk in the ninth century, one wants to know if this monk was in Constantinople or the Judean desert when he produced it. The text certainly would have an apologetic/polemic value in the world of Islam, where another recension of the story circulated

Of course, around the year 810 Michael Synkellos did compose a basic introduction to Greek grammar and syntax, which the title paragraphs of some of the manuscripts of the work say he composed in Edessa, at the request of a deacon named Lazarus.⁶⁶ But the very need for such a work suggests that the study of Greek had become an academic exercise.

During the ninth century the Arabic-speaking monks of the Judean desert monasteries, and particularly those of Mar Sabas monastery, found themselves at the heart of an Arabic-speaking, ecclesiastical network that stretched from the territories of the patriarchate of Antioch, southwards through the Sinai and into Egypt, with Jerusalem as the constant point of reference. For, until the return of effective Byzantine power to the area in the eleventh century there was a steady decline in the numbers of "Melkites" and a gradual disappearance of their institutions in many places outside of Palestine.⁶⁷ To be sure, there were patriarchs of record in both Alexandria and Antioch during this time, as well as incumbents in other sees, but it is worth noting that in the two instances in the Byzantine sources which mention meetings of the three Oriental Patriarchs to issue statements about icon veneration, in 763 and 836 respectively, the venue is said to have been Jerusalem.⁶⁸

As for the wholesale adoption of Arabic among the "Melkites" during a century and more of virtual isolation from Byzantium, there are two interesting testimonies to its widespread use by Crusader times. Jacques de Vitry (1170-1213), the Latin bishop of Acre, mentions it in his *History of Jerusalem*. Speaking of the *Syri*, as he called the local Arabophone Christians, he says,

The Syrians use the Saracen language in their common speech, and they use the Saracen script in deeds and business and all other writing, except for the Holy Scriptures and other religious books, in which they use the Greek letters; wherefore in divine service, their laity, who only know the Saracenic tongue, do not understand them. . . . The Syrians exactly follow

in Arabic. See Daniel Gimaret, *Le livre de Bilawhar et Budasf, selon la version arabe ismaélienne* (Paris, 1971); *idem*, *Kitāb Bilawhar wa Būdḥāsf* (Beyrouth, 1972). Given the Georgian connection of the Christian text, and the fact that at least one scholar, D.M. Lang, has argued that the Greek is a translation from Georgian (in the intro. to G.R. Woodward & H. Mattingly, *St. John Damascene; Barlaam and Ioasaph* (Loeb Classical Library; Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1967), one has to leave open the possibility that John the Sabaites composed it originally in Arabic in Palestine in the ninth century, and that it was subsequently translated into Georgian in Palestine, and into Greek in Byzantium — the route of a number of other Palestinian compositions of the ninth century into Greek.

⁶⁶ See D. Donnet, "Le traité de grammaire de Michel le Syncelle, inventaire préalable à l'histoire du texte," *Bulletin d'Institut Historique Belge de Rome* 40 (1969), pp. 38-39.

⁶⁷ See Hugh Kennedy, "The Melkite Church from the Islamic Conquest to the Crusades: Continuity and Adaptation in the Byzantine Legacy," in *The 17th International Byzantine Congress: Major Papers* (New Rochelle, N.Y., 1986), pp. 325-343.

⁶⁸ For the 763 synod in Jerusalem see J.D. Mansi, *Sacrorum Conciliorum nova et amplissima Collectio* (Florence, 1769-), vol. XII, col. 680. On the 836 synod and its alleged letter to the Byzantine emperor, see nn. 27, 28, & 29 above.

the rules and customs of the Greeks in divine service and other spiritual matters, and obey them as their superiors.⁶⁹

The Latin bishop here calls attention to two facts: the widespread use of Arabic in the Jerusalem patriarchate in the twelfth century, and the continuing presence of Greek in the liturgy, even though, as we shall see below, lectionaries in Arabic had been available since the late eighth century. Similarly, the Armenian chronicler Matthew of Edessa testifies not only to the use of Arabic on the part of the "Melkites" of Antioch in the eleventh century, but he finds it shocking that they are so completely inculturated into the world of Islam. In his report of the capture of Antioch by a Turkish force in 1084/1085 he speaks of the locals as people "who consider themselves Romans in faith, but in essence should be regarded as Muslims because of the language they use and because of their deeds."⁷⁰ In Egypt by the tenth century writers were already bemoaning the loss of both Coptic and Greek in the Christian community and their replacement by Arabic. The composer of the *History of the Patriarchs*, for example, says of a number of his Arabophone colleagues:

I begged them to assist me in translating the histories that we found written in the Coptic and Greek languages into the Arabic tongue, current among the people of the present day in the region of Egypt, most of whom are ignorant of the Coptic and the Greek, so that they might be satisfied with such translations when they read them.⁷¹

⁶⁹ Jacques de Vitry, *The History of Jerusalem: A.D. 1180* (trans. Aubrey Steward; London, 1896), pp. 68-69.

⁷⁰ Ara Edmond Dostourian, *Armenia and the Crusades, 10th to 12th Centuries; the Chronicle of Matthew of Edessa* (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 1993), p. 148. The text refers to the locals as a "perfidious, effeminate, and abominable nation called the *Pelitik*, who consider themselves. . . ." In a note the translator reports the opinion of the first modern translator of the Armenian text (E. Dulaurier (trans.), *Chronique de Matthieu d'Edesse* (Paris, 1898), p. 422, n. 3) to the effect that the *Pelitik* are the Antiochenes (Dostourian, p. 324, section 78, n. 2). Another modern translator phrases the passage slightly differently: "à cause de la mauvaise et lâche nation des *Peletik*, qui se disent romains par la foi, mais qui, par la langue et les actions sont tout simplement des Arabes." Gérard Dédéyan, "Regard sur les communautés chrétiennes orientales," *Arabica* 43 (1996), p. 109. The Armenian word translated by Dostourian as "Muslims" and by Dédéyan as "Arabs" is *Tachikk*. It is presumably derived from the name of the Arab tribe *al-Ṭayy*. See Robert W. Thomson, *Agathangelos, History of the Armenians: Translation and Commentary* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1976), p. 456, n. 23. See also Thomson's reference to the information on this word in H. Hübschmann, *Armenische Grammatik* (I. Theil, Armenische Etymologie; Leipzig, 1897), pp. 86-87. In using this word to refer first to "Arabs" and then to "Muslims," Armenians may have been following the example of Syriac-speaking writers who similarly use the Syriac form of the Arab tribe's name, i.e., *Ṭayyāyē*. See J.S. Trimmingham, *Christianity among the Arabs in Pre-Islamic Times* (London: Longman, 1979), p. 213. As for the term *Peletik*, it is in all likelihood an Armenian transliteration of the Arabic *baladī*, which means "native," "indigenous." This interpretation was first put forward in *Patm'ut'ien Matt'ēosi Urhayec'woy i hayrapetut'ean T.T. Gēorgay Srbazan Kat'ulikosi amenayn Hayoc'* (Jerusalem, 1869), p. 562, n. 158. For this information I am indebted to my colleague, Monica J. Blanchard, in the Institute of Christian Oriental Research, The Catholic University of America.

⁷¹ B. Evetts, "History of the Patriarchs of the Coptic Church of Alexandria," *Patrologia*

Bishop Severus ibn al-Muqaffa' (c. 905-987) wrote even more poignantly on the subject. He said,

I recall, my friend, that in these times differing statements about the Orthodox Faith abound among the Copts. Every one of them has an opinion which is at variance with the opinion of every other one, and he calls him an infidel. You are astonished at this and bewildered, but you should not be astonished at it. The reason for this ignorance of theirs involves their language, because the Arabic language has overcome them. There is no one of them left who knows what he is reading about in church in the Coptic language. They have come to the point of hearing but not understanding. And for this reason there has disappeared from among them the knowledge of the Christian creed, which in the beginning had held the upperhand over all the tribes of Christendom.⁷²

As for the "Melkites" of the see of Jerusalem in the ninth century, better evidence than any number of contemporary testimonies for their adoption of Arabic is the archive of "old south Palestinian" manuscripts in that language which Joshua Blau has studied so closely from the linguistic point of view.⁷³ They are Arabic texts written by Christian monks in the ninth and tenth centuries, many of them having some connection with the Holy Land monasteries of Mar Sabas and Mar Chariton.⁷⁴ Out of the sixty-some works on Blau's list, only a half dozen or so are original compositions in Arabic.⁷⁵ All of these are apologetical works of one kind or another. The remaining texts are translations and they are all "church-books," meaning that they served a practical, ecclesiastical purpose in the "Melkite" community. Among them is a group of thirty-five items, consisting mainly of homilies, saints' lives, martyrdoms, patristic selections, and so forth, while twenty-one pieces are Arabic versions of parts of the scriptures. This ratio of original compositions to translations, leaving room for the reassignment of some of the hagiographical items to the status of originals, accords well with what one otherwise knows of the socio-historical situation of Christians in Syria/Palestine in the early Abbasid period. The "church-books" would have served the ongoing needs of the members of the "Melkite" community, whose vernacular language would increasingly have been Arabic. The apologetic, original compositions

Orientalis 1 (1907), p. 115. See also the remarks of the eighth century author of the *Apocalypse of Samuel of Qalamūn*, in J. Ziadeh, "L'apocalypse de Samuel, supérieur de Deir-el Qalamoun," *Revue de l'Orient Chrétien* 20 (1915-1917), pp. 379-383.

⁷² Murqus Jirjis, *Kitāb ad-durr ath-thamīn fī idāh ad-dīn lilqiddīs al-anbā sāwīrus* (Cairo, 1925), pp. 261-262.

⁷³ See Joshua Blau, *A Grammar of Christian Arabic* (CSCO, vols. 267, 276, 279; Louvain: Peeters, 1966-1967).

⁷⁴ See the studies collected in Sidney H. Griffith, *Arabic Christianity in the Monasteries of Ninth-Century Palestine* (Aldershot, Hampshire, U.K.: Variorum, 1992).

⁷⁵ See Blau, *Grammar*, I, vol. 267, pp. 21-23.

in Arabic represent the first steps taken by Christians in the caliphate to address themselves in that language to religious issues arising from beyond their own internal community life, issues which take into account questions raised by Muslims and others, and which inevitably would have been raised in Arabic. From these beginnings there grew the vast literary heritage of the "Melkites" in Arabic, which in subsequent centuries would come to express every aspect of their ecclesiastical life in the world of Islam.⁷⁶

So distinctive is the Arabic idiom employed in the "old south Palestinian" texts of the ninth and tenth centuries that Joshua Blau has recently suggested that in the ensemble the whole archive of them furnishes enough evidence to warrant the conclusion that there was among the "Melkites" throughout the caliphate a literary *koiné*, which served as an Arabic *lingua franca* for the "Melkite" community throughout the oriental patriarchates.⁷⁷ This *lingua franca* then became the cultural carrier of the distinctive "Melkite" identity among the Christians living in the world of Islam. It had at its core an allegiance to the orthodoxy of the "six councils" as they had been accepted in the late seventh century in the Judean desert monasteries of Jerusalem,⁷⁸ the doctrines of which were systematized and put forward in summary fashion by the great eighth century teacher from Mar Sabas monastery, John of Damascus.⁷⁹ One must remember in this connection that in Syria/Palestine in the time before the Crusades there is no evidence of the *Synodicon of Orthodoxy*,⁸⁰ or any trace of a sense of an orthodoxy restored in 843, as was the case in Constantinople.⁸¹

Particularly noteworthy in the archive of Arabic texts from Palestine in the ninth and tenth centuries are the translations of the scriptures, particularly the Gospels, the saints' lives, and the monastic texts. They testify respectively to the lively liturgical life of the Arabophone Christian community, the devotion paid to those who stood up to the overweening power of the

⁷⁶ See Joseph Nasrallah, *Histoire d'un mouvement littéraire dans l'église melchite du V^e au XX^e siècle; contribution à l'étude de la littérature arabe chrétienne* (5 vols. to date; Louvain: Peeters, 1979-).

⁷⁷ See Joshua Blau, "A Melkite Arabic Literary *Lingua Franca* from the Second Half of the First Millennium," *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies* 57 (1994), pp. 14-16.

⁷⁸ In due course "Melkites" included the seventh ecumenical council, Nicea II in 787, among the councils of orthodoxy, but the practice of affirming the "six councils" lasted until modern times. Among the "Melkite" collections of canons in Arabic from the 13th to the 17th, centuries, only seven of the twenty-one MSS mention the seventh council. See J.B. Darblade, *La collection canonique arabe des Melkites (XIII^e-XVII^e siècles)* (Harissa, 1946), pp. 154-155.

⁷⁹ See Basilius Studer, *Die theologische Arbeitsweise des Johannes von Damaskus* (Studia Patristica et Byzantina, 2; Ettal: Buch-Kunstverlag, 1956). See also Griffith, "Melkites in the Umayyad Era."

⁸⁰ It is interesting to note that a fourteenth century manuscript of the *Synodicon Vetus* comes from St. Catherine's monastery at Mt. Sinai. See John Duffy & John Parker, *The Synodicon Vetus; Text, Translation, and Notes* (Dumbarton Oaks Texts, 5; Washington: Dumbarton Oaks, 1979), p. xvii.

⁸¹ See Hussey, *The Orthodox Church*, pp. 62-65.

Islamic government, and the continued importance of the monastic communities of the Judean desert at the heart of "Melkite" life. The earliest Gospel texts include notices about which passages are to be read at which times in the liturgical year, and in one family of texts one can even trace the corrections and improvements readers have made from one manuscript to another.⁸² As for the saints' lives, a particularly interesting selection of them, recount the passions of the so-called "neo-martyrs." In Byzantine parlance, this designation applies to those who lost their lives in affirmation of their faith at the hands of Muslims, on the model of the ancient martyrs who suffered similarly at the hands of the Roman authorities before the conversion of the empire in the time of Emperor Constantine (324-337).

Among the texts which have survived from the *scriptoria* of the Holy Land monasteries of the early Islamic period, there are a half-dozen martyrologies of this sort in Greek, Georgian and Arabic, which recount the exploits of individual Christians who encountered caliphs or emirs, and who lost their lives in testimony to the tenacity of their faith. According to the texts, all of these encounters either took place in Palestine, or had Palestinian connections. Some of the accounts of them were written originally in Greek, some in Arabic, and some, although written in Greek or Arabic, are preserved only in Georgian. All of them are now anonymous compositions. And although none of them are dated, they all emanate from that era in the ninth and tenth centuries when the "Melkite" community in Syria/Palestine was finding its identity and beginning to make Arabic an ecclesiastical language in the new world order. The martyrs were: Michael the Sabaïte,⁸³ Peter of Capitolias,⁸⁴ 'Abd al-Masīḥ an-Najrānī al-Ghassānī,⁸⁵ Romanos the Neomartyr,⁸⁶ Bacchus,⁸⁷ and Anthony Ruwaḥ, or Rawḥ al Qurashī.⁸⁸

In the context of the early Islamic period one customarily thinks of conversion as a one-way process; socially upwardly mobile Christians were moving

⁸² See Sidney H. Griffith, "The Gospel in Arabic: an Inquiry into its Appearance in the First Abbasid Century," *Oriens Christianus* 69 (1985), pp. 126-167, reprinted in Griffith, *Arabic Christianity in the Monasteries*, no. II.

⁸³ See P. Peeters, "La passion de s. Michel le sabaïte," *Analecta Bollandiana* 48 (1930), pp. 65-98.

⁸⁴ See P. Peeters, "La passion de s. Pierre de Capitolias (+13 janvier 715)," *Analecta Bollandiana* 57 (1939), pp. 299-333.

⁸⁵ See S.H. Griffith, "The Arabic Account of 'Abd al-Masīḥ an-Najrānī al-Ghassānī," *Le Muséon* 98 (1985), pp. 331-374.

⁸⁶ P. Peeters, "S. Romain le néomartyr (+1 mai 780) d'après un document géorgien," *Analecta Bollandiana* 30 (1911), pp. 393-427.

⁸⁷ See F.F. Combefis, *Christi Martyrum Tres; Hyacinthus Amastrensis, Bacchus et Elias Novi Martyres Agarenico pridem mucrone sublati* (Paris, 1666), pp. 61-126; P. Ap. Demetrakopoulou, "Hagios Bakchos O Neos," in *Epistemonike Epeteris tes Philosophikes Scholes tou Panepistemiou Athenon* (Athens, 1979), pp. 331-362.

⁸⁸ See Ignace Dick, "La passion arabe de s. Antoine Ruwaḥ, néomartyr de Damas (+25 déc. 799)," *Le Muséon* 74 (1961), pp. 109-133; Samir Khalil Samir, "Saint Rawḥ al-Qurashī, étude d'onomastique arabe et authenticité de sa passion," *Le Muséon* 105 (1992), pp. 343-359.

in growing numbers into the ranks of the Muslims, particularly after the Abbasid revolution made full integration of non-Arabs into the Islamic *ummah* a possibility. Yet in all six martyrs' stories conversion emerges as a problem in the narratives, but it is the conversion of Muslims to Christianity. Three of the martyrs lost their lives precisely because they were apostates from Islam: 'Abd al-Masīḥ an-Najrānī al-Ghassānī, Bacchus, and Rawḥ al-Qurashī, alias St. Anthony Ruwaḥ. And in the other three stories, the protagonists, Michael the Sabaïte, Peter of Capitolias, and St. Romanos, in addition to reviling Islam, the *Qur'ān*, and the prophet Muḥammad, were all engaged in attempts to persuade Muslims to convert to Christianity, particularly those who had recently apostatized from the church. This circumstance calls the reader's attention to the fact that in the "Melkite" milieu of these narratives, even in those composed originally in Greek, the Arabic language itself served as a vehicle whereby Christianity became a religious option for some Muslims.⁸⁹

A special feature of the martyrologies is the report which most of them contain of an interview between the martyr and a caliph, an emir, or some other Muslim official, in which the martyr takes the opportunity to give instructions on the rudiments of the Christian faith, along with a declaration of what he views as the short-comings of Islam. In due course in Arab Christian history, literary dialogues of this sort take on a life of their own and become an integral part of the apologetical/polemical literature produced by Christians in the early Islamic period. In fact they constitute a distinct, and very popular literary genre in Arab Christian religious writing, which the present writer calls simply, "the Monk in the Emir's *Majlis*."⁹⁰ The martyrologies, literarily speaking, are the ancestors of these dialogue texts.

The martyrs' narratives all had monastic connections too, and this observation leads one to notice the high incidence of monastic texts in the archive of "old south Palestinian" manuscripts. Typical are the two manuscripts copied by the scribe Anthony David of Baghdad at Mar Sabas monastery "in the year 272 of the years of the Arabs,"⁹¹ as he says in a colophon to one of them, i.e. 885/886 A.D., on the commission of the abbot of the monastery at Mt. Sinai. All of the works which Anthony David copied in

⁸⁹ For more on these narratives see S.H. Griffith, "Christians, Muslims, and Neo-Martyrs; Saints' Lives and Holy Land History," to be published in the proceedings of the conference, "Interactions between Religious Communities in the Holy Land (1st-15th Centuries)," Jerusalem, Yad Izhak Ben-Zvi, 2-5 October, 1994.

⁹⁰ See S.H. Griffith, "The Monk in the Emir's *Majlis*: Reflections on a Popular Genre of Christian Literary Apologetics in Arabic in the Early Islamic Period." We have noted above the similarity of these dialogues to that recorded in the Slavic *Life of Constantine*. See nn. 46 & 47 above. More comparable to the martyrologies under discussion here is the dialogue with Muslims about religion included in the Greek account of the 42 martyrs of Amorium. See for now the discussion in A.P. Kazhdan, "Hagiographical Notes," *Byzantion* 56 (1986), pp. 151-160.

⁹¹ I. Krackovsky, "Novezavetnyi apokrif v arabskoy rukopisi 885-886 goda," *Vizantijskij Vremennik* 14 (1907), p. 261.

the two manuscripts are translations from Greek into Arabic, and all of them are of an ascetical character, either lives of monastic saints, homilies, or tales of the spiritual feats of monastic heroes. Prominent among them are the lives of Saint Euthymius and Saint Sabas by Cyril of Schythopolis, the major saints of Judean desert monasticism.⁹² Another Arabic manuscript written at Mar Sabas in the same era also contains extracts from Cyril of Schythopolis' *Lives of the Monks of Palestine*. It is the so-called *Codex Rescriptus Tischendorf 2*. A notable feature of this manuscript, which underscores the shift from Greek to Arabic in the monastic community in ninth-century Palestine, is the fact that the Arabic translation of Cyril's *Lives* is written over an erased Greek text, which has been dated palaeographically to the eighth century.⁹³ In fact, it is only in Arabic that the full text of Cyril's life of the monk Abraamius (474-557) has been preserved.⁹⁴ These early translations of the *Lives* of Cyril of Schythopolis, which do not adhere slavishly to the original Greek, but make an effort to have the accounts come alive in Arabic, in terms of the new cultural circumstances,⁹⁵ are a sign of the continued importance of the monastic establishment in the "Melkite" community of the time. A more direct testimony to this state of affairs is the following passage from the story of the martyrdom of Michael the Sabaïte. The ninth century author, presumably writing in Arabic, says,

Just as Jerusalem is the queen of all cities, so is the *laura* of Sabas the prince of all deserts, and so far as Jerusalem is the norm of other cities, so too is St. Saba the exemplar for other monasteries.⁹⁶

⁹² See S.H. Griffith, "Anthony David of Baghdad, Scribe and Monk of Mar Sabas: Arabic in the Monasteries of Palestine," *Church History* 58 (1989), pp. 7-19, reprinted in Griffith, *Arabic Christianity in the Monasteries* no. XI.

⁹³ See H.L. Fleischer, "Über einen griechisch-arabischen Codex rescriptus der Leipziger Universitäts-Bibliothek," in H.L. Fleischer, *Kleinere Schriften* (vol. 3; Leipzig, 1888), pp. 378-388. See also M. van Esbroeck, "Le Codex Rescriptus Tischendorf 2 à Leipzig et Cyrille de Scythopolis en version arabe," in Khalil Samir (ed.), *Actes du deuxième congrès international d'études arabes chrétiennes* (Orientalia Christiana Analecta, 226; Rome, 1986), pp. 81-91.

⁹⁴ See C. Graf, "Athār našrānī qadīm; aw tarjama mār Abramiūs al-qiddīs bi l'arabiyyah," *al-Machriq* 8 (1905), pp. 258-265. Graf also published a German translation of the text in G. Graf, "Die arabische Vita des hl. Abramias," *Byzantinische Zeitschrift* 14 (1905), pp. 509-518. What is preserved in Arabic is incorporated into the French version of the life of Abramios in A.J. Festugière, *Les moines d'orient* (vol. III, part 3, *Les moines de Palestine*; Paris, 1963), pp. 69-79. In R.M. Price (trans.), *Cyril of Scythopolis: the Lives of the Monks of Palestine* (Kalamazoo, Mich.: Cistercian Publications, 1991), the English version of the portions of Abraamius' life that are missing from the Greek are translated from the Latin version of the Arabic by P. Peeters, "Historia S. Abramii ex apographo arabico," *Analecta Bollandiana* 24 (1905), pp. 349-356.

⁹⁵ See the forthcoming study by Kate Leeming, "Byzantine History in Arabic: Translations of Greek Hagiographies in a Ninth-Century Palestinian Manuscript (Vaticanus Arabicus 71)," a paper presented to the Syriac Symposium II, The Catholic University of America 8-10 June 1995.

⁹⁶ Peeters, "La passion de s. Michel le sabaïte," par. 14, p. 76.

III *The Religious Challenge of Islam*

In addition to translating the classics of the Byzantine patristic and liturgical heritage into Arabic, the monks of Palestine, and others in the "Melkite" network in the caliphate, were also composing original theological tracts in Arabic. In these works their efforts were to put forward their theology in an Arabic idiom that would answer to the religious concerns of others in the world of Islam, notably the Muslim *mutakallimūn*. In the process, these writers developed some culturally specific ways of presenting Christian teaching, in response to the Islamic critique, which set them apart from their co-religionists in Byzantium, who were also responding to the same challenge of Islam in the ninth century, but in a notably different way. For the Arabophone Christians, in addition to the apologetical/polemical imperative, there was the need, authentically to profess Christianity in the new cultural medium of the world of Islam; for the Byzantines, writing in Greek, it was mostly a matter of invective, polemically demeaning the religious ideology of the perennial enemy. Beginning in the ninth century, these two, contrasting responses to the call to Islam would do their part in helping to define the growing cultural distance between the "Melkite" Christians in the caliphate and the "Byzantine" Christians of the empire of the Romans, whose liturgy and Orthodoxy the "Melkites" were busily transposing into a new idiom. The resulting differences in theological expression, when they are put together with the disparities of culture and language, along with the relative lack of communication between the churches of Constantinople and Jerusalem in the ninth and tenth centuries, define the conditions for the emergence of a new Christian identity particular to the world of Islam. Here we may the most succinctly display the differences between a "Melkite" and a "Byzantine" Christian response to the new situation by considering very briefly the profiles in controversy of two important thinkers and writers of the ninth century, Theodore Abū Qurrah, who lived in the world of Islam and wrote in Arabic, and Niketas Byzantios, who lived in Byzantium and wrote in Greek.

Theodore Abū Qurrah

The most productive writer in the "Melkite" community in the early ninth century was Theodore Abū Qurrah (c. 755 – c. 830).⁹⁷ Sometime monk of Mar Sabas monastery, and bishop of Ḥarrān in Mesopotamia, Abū Qurrah was well known in his own day as an effective apologist for Christianity in

⁹⁷ For a fuller discussion of Abū Qurrah and his works in the context of the concerns of the present essay, see S.H. Griffith, "What Has Constantinople to Do with Jerusalem," in the soon to be published proceedings of the 30th Spring Symposium of Byzantine Studies, "Dead or Alive? the Byzantine World in the Ninth Century," University of Birmingham, 23-26 March 1996.

controversy with Muslim *mutakallimīn*, as well as an upholder of the orthodoxy of the six councils of the Byzantine church among his fellow Christians in the world of Islam.⁹⁸ Works attributed to him survive in Arabic,⁹⁹ and Greek,¹⁰⁰ while he himself testifies that he also wrote in Syriac.¹⁰¹ In all probability, the Greek works attributed to Abū Qurrah are translations from Arabic.¹⁰² It is likely that his shorter "sayings" were reported in Greek in Byzantium, where many monks from the Holy Land fled in the early ninth century.¹⁰³ An insight to this process is provided by the newly published introduction to Abū Qurrah's *opusculum* XVIII from an eleventh century manuscript in which the reporter, one John the Deacon, speaks in the first person and then recounts in Greek Abū Qurrah's debate with a Muslim, surely conducted in Arabic, when the monk/bishop was called to take part in a controversy between Muslims and Christians in Ashdod, a town in Palestine on the Mediterranean seacoast, not far north of Gaza and Ascalon, because the local Christians, having been stumped in debate, called on him for help.¹⁰⁴

Among Christians Abū Qurrah's principal adversaries were the "Jacobites,"

⁹⁸ See Sidney H. Griffith, *Theodore Abū Qurrah; the Intellectual Profile of an Arab Christian Writer of the First Abbasid Century* (Annual Lecture of the Dr. Irene Halmos Chair of Arabic Literature, 1992; Tel Aviv: Tel Aviv University, 1992); *idem*, "Reflections on the Biography of Theodore Abū Qurrah," *Parole de l'Orient* 18 (1993), pp. 143-170.

⁹⁹ See the list of them, with the details of their editions and translations, in Griffith, *Theodore Abū Qurrah; the Intellectual Profile*, pp. 9-13. To the list must now be added John C. Lamoreaux, "An Unedited Tract against the Armenians by Theodore Abū Qurrah," *Le Muséon* 105 (1992), pp. 327-341.

¹⁰⁰ Works in Greek attributed to Abū Qurrah are collected in *PG*, XC VII, cols. 1445-1602, with the exception of one which is printed among the works of John of Damascus in *PG*, XC IV, cols. 1595-1598. Other, unpublished texts in Greek are also attributed to Abū Qurrah. See Griffith, *Theodore Abū Qurrah; the Intellectual Profile*, pp. 44-45, n. 13. A new, critical edition of 17 of the Greek texts, several of them hitherto unpublished, attributed to Abū Qurrah and having to do with the Christian response to the challenge of Islam, have recently been published under the title *Opuscula Islamica* in Reinhold Glei & Adel Theodor Khoury, *Johannes Damaskenos und Theodor Abū Qurra, Schriften zum Islam* (Corpus Islamo-Christianum, 3; Würzburg: Echter Verlag/Altenberge: Oros Verlag, 1995).

¹⁰¹ See Abū Qurrah's remark toward the beginning of his treatise, *On the Death of the Messiah*, where he mentions the "thirty tracts (*maymaran*) we composed in Syriac." Constantin Bacha, *Les oeuvres arabes de Theodore Aboucara* (Beyrouth, 1904), p. 60.

¹⁰² This was the case with a letter to the Armenians, *opusculum* IV, which Abū Qurrah wrote in Arabic at the behest of Patriarch Thomas, and which Michael Synkellos then translated into Greek. See *PG*, vol. XC VII, col. 1504D. This fact suggests at the very least that Arabic was Abū Qurrah's preferred language.

¹⁰³ This certainly seems to have been the case with *opusculum* IX (*PG*, XC VII, col. 1529), the Arabic original for which has come to light. See S.H. Griffith, "Some Unpublished Arabic Sayings Attributed to Theodore Abū Qurrah," *Le Muséon* 92 (1979), pp. 29-35.

¹⁰⁴ See Glei & Khoury, *Johannes Damaskenos und Theodor Abū Qurra*, pp. 86-88. It is exciting to find in the heading to the *opusculum* that the report of the bishop's debate has been transmitted "διὰ φωνῆς Ἰωάννου Διακόνου." In Le Quien's edition of the text in *PG*, XC IV, col. 1596, the last word of this phrase had been reported as Δαμασκηνοῦ, creating all sorts of difficulties for interpreters. See, e.g., Griffith, *Theodore Abū Qurrah, the Intellectual Profile*, p. 19.

and particularly the Armenians among them, with whom he was often in controversy.¹⁰⁵ But he is remembered most of all for his encounters with Muslims, and for his efforts to prove from reason that Christianity is the true religion.¹⁰⁶ What is more, throughout his Arabic works Abū Qurrah shows a familiarity with the religious idiom of Islam, and with the text of the *Qurʾān*, in terms of which he attempts newly to articulate the truths of Christianity. Of all his works, two in particular might be reviewed here to show how an Arab Christian intellectual at the turn of the eighth and ninth centuries functioned in the world of Islam.

The treatise "On the Existence of the Creator and the True Religion"¹⁰⁷ is perhaps Abū Qurrah's first composition, probably written at Mar Sabas between 785 and 799. It is divided into two parts, with two subject matters. The first part is a demonstration from reason of the existence of the one God, the Creator of all things, utilizing the traditional philosophical argument from design, according to the method of the contemporary Muslim *mutakallimīn*. This is the genius of the piece. Abū Qurrah is presenting traditional Christian thinking in the new context of the Arabic world of Islam, in the very idiom of the Muslim religious intellectuals of the day, with whom he must be considered to have been in regular dialogue.

Similarly, in the second half of the treatise Abū Qurrah presented a rational scheme for discerning the true religion which the reader can see is based on the prophetology of the *Qurʾān*. He argues that the true religion is the one whose messenger has brought a scripture in which the description of God, the commands and prohibitions, and the rewards and punishments are most in accord with what the human reason can recognize as being appropriate to the highest conception of the divine. Abū Qurrah then surveys nine

¹⁰⁵ Abū Qurrah's Armenian connections were numerous. He went there to debate with Nonnus of Nisibis around the year 813/814. See A. Van Roey, *Nonnus de Nisibe, traité apologétique, étude, texte et traduction* (Bibliothèque du Muséon, vol. 21, Louvain, 1948). He wrote a tract in Arabic against the Armenians. See Lamoreux, "An Unedited Tract against the Armenians." He wrote a letter to the Armenians about doctrinal matters on behalf of Patriarch Thomas of Jerusalem. See n. 100 above. In Jerusalem in the early ninth century there seems to have been a campaign to enlist the Armenians among the Chalcedonians and some Armenians there were cooperating with it. See. S. Peter Cowe, "An Armenian Job Fragment from Sinai and its Implications," *Oriens Christianus* 76 (1992), pp. 123-157.

¹⁰⁶ See Sidney H. Griffith, "Faith and Reason in Christian Kalām: Theodore Abū Qurrah on Discerning the True Religion," in Samir Khalil Samir & Jørgen S. Nielsen (eds.), *Christian Arabic Apologetics during the Abbasid Period (750-1258)* (Studies in the History of Religions, vol. 63; Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1994), pp. 1-43.

¹⁰⁷ Ignace Dick, *Theodore Abuqurra, traité de l'existence du créateur et de la vraie religion* (Patrimoine Arabe Chrétien, 3; Jounieh & Rome, 1982). An English translation is available by George H. Khoury, "Theodore Abū Qurrah (c. 750-820): Translation and Critical Analysis of his 'Treatise on the Existence of the Creator and on the True Religion,'" (Ph.D. Dissertation: The Graduate Theological Union, Berkeley, California; Ann Arbor, Michigan: University Microfilms International, 1991).

religious groups and their teachings under these headings, including Jews, Christians, and Muslims.¹⁰⁸ He puts the survey into the context of the adventures of an Arcadian figure who had come down from the mountains into the world of the first Abbasid century, where he successively meets members of the nine religious groups, whose teachings he describes in the first person. The Muslims are the last group, and the Arcadian gives the following account of them:

I left the others and met finally with some Muslims, who said: do not listen to the words of those you met, because they are all unbelievers, associating [other gods] with God. There is no religion but the religion of Islam, sent by God to all the peoples, at the hands of his prophet Muḥammad, calling you to worship only God, and not to associate anything with him, commanding you to do what is permissible and good, and forbidding you from doing what is unlawful and evil. He promised he will raise the dead. And the reward to those who do good is paradise, wherein flow rivers of water, milk, honey, and wine—pleasure to those who drink from it, and women who were deflowered neither by the jinn nor by men, as well as a life of luxury: all good things that man desires, and palaces made of emerald, sapphire, gold, and silver, along with other, similar things, forever. And to evildoers he promised hell, whose fire is inextinguishable.¹⁰⁹

In comparing the nine religions, their doctrines of God and their moral teachings, Abū Qurrah concludes, of course, that Christianity is the true religion. The important point to notice, however, is that he makes an effort to present each faith fairly, as may be seen in his description of Islam. There is no distortion here on the order of what one finds in the works of contemporary Greek writers on Islam, such as John of Damascus or Niketas Byzantios.

The same may be said about the second work by Theodore Abū Qurrah which it will be opportune to mention here, his treatise on the duty of all Christians to venerate the holy icons.¹¹⁰ Abū Qurrah wrote it in all probability in the first decade of the ninth century. He dedicated it to a man called Yannah, who was an official at the Church of the Icon of Christ in Edessa. A problem had developed in that some Christians were refusing to venerate the church's famous icon, or any other icon, not because of the policies of the Iconoclasts in Byzantium, but, according to Abū Qurrah, because in the caliphate Jews and Muslims were accusing them of practicing idolatry. Abū Qurrah wrote the treatise to refute this charge, and to demon-

¹⁰⁸ See Guy Monnot, "Abū Qurra et la pluralité des religions," *Revue de l'Histoire des Religions* 208 (1991), pp. 49-71.

¹⁰⁹ George H. Khouury, "Theodore Abu Qurrah: Translation and Critical Analysis," p. 132.

¹¹⁰ Ignace Dick, *Théodore Abuqurra, traité du culte des icônes; introduction et texte critique* (Patrimoine Arabe Chrétien, 10; Jounieh & Rome, 1986). The English translation is available in S.H. Griffith, *A Treatise on the Veneration of the Holy Icons, written in Arabic by Theodore Abū Qurrah, Bishop of Harrān* (Eastern Christian Texts in Translation, 1; Leuven: Peeters, 1997).

strate that the veneration of the icons is incumbent upon all Christians, and especially the icon of Christ crucified.

Abū Qurrah's treatise directly addresses a problem which had arisen between Muslims and Christians in the caliphate.¹¹¹ He shows himself to be thoroughly aware of Islamic ideas and customs, and he is able to offer a defense of Christian doctrine and practice in the fluent Arabic of one fully inculcated into the world of Islam. From the Christian perspective, the treatise can stand on its own merits beside those by St. John of Damascus and St. Theodore Studites on the same subject. Although Abū Qurrah borrows much from John of Damascus, his work also has much in it that is original, and uniquely contextual with life in the Arabic-speaking milieu.

There are other works of Theodore Abū Qurrah which similarly display his familiarity with Islam, and his serious consideration of the religious challenge which the Muslim thinkers posed for Christians in the Islamic world. One might mention in this connection his Arabic treatise *On Human Freedom*, in which he wrestles with ideas currently under discussion among the Muslim *mutakallimīn*,¹¹² or his tract *On the Law, the Prophets and the Gospel*. In it he explains the Christian method of biblical interpretation, which is at the heart of his and other Christian writers' responses to Islam, as well as a conciliar theology which he presents as the continuation of a scripture-warranted biblical hermeneutic.¹¹³ All of these texts exhibit the same degree of serious and respectful acceptance of the religious challenge of Islam. The theological emphases which marked Theodore Abū Qurrah's work also marked the growing distance between the theological profiles of the "Melkite" church in the world of Islam, and the Byzantine church in Constantinople.

Niketas Byzantios

By way of contrast to the apologetical style of Theodore Abū Qurrah, one might usefully end the discussion of the distance between Constantinople and Jerusalem in the ninth century by briefly considering the stance toward Islam adopted in the heart of Byzantium by Niketas Byzantios. He was a contemporary of Patriarch Photius (858-867 & 877-886), who enjoyed a reputation as a philosopher and a religious controversialist. Although virtually nothing is known of his biography, a number of works attributed to him have survived,

¹¹¹ See S.H. Griffith, "Images, Islam and Christian Icons," in Pierre Canivet et Jean-Paul Rey-Coquais, *La Syrie de Byzance à l'Islam* (Damas, 1992), pp. 121-138. See also the thought provoking suggestions of Paul Speck, "Was für Bilder eigentlich? neue Überlegungen zu dem Bilderedikt des Kalifen Yazid," *Le Muséon* 109 (1996), pp. 267-278.

¹¹² See S.H. Griffith, "Free Will in Christian Kalām: the Doctrine of Theodore Abū Qurrah," *Parole de l'Orient* 15 (1987), pp. 79-107.

¹¹³ See S.H. Griffith, "Muslims and Church Councils; the Apology of Theodore Abū Qurrah," in Elizabeth A. Livingstone (ed.), *Studia Patristica* 15 (1993), pp. 270-299.

among them polemical texts against the "Monophysite" Armenians, the Latins (for their espousal of the *filioque* clause in the creed), and three works against the Muslims.¹¹⁴ The latter are the works which concern us here, not least because they became the classics of Byzantine, anti-Islamic polemics, from which later Greek writers, until well into the Middle Ages, quoted regularly and liberally.¹¹⁵

The three works against the Muslims attributed to Niketas Byzantios include two letters which were composed in defense of the Christian faith in response to two attacks on it contained in two letters from unnamed Muslims addressed to Emperor Michael III (842-867),¹¹⁶ and a refutation of the *Qur'ān*, which circulated under the title 'Ανατροπή τῆς παρά τοῦ ἄραβος Μωάμετ πλαστογραφηθείσης βίβλου.¹¹⁷ There are still no critical editions of these texts, and few scholarly studies. Nevertheless, a consensus has evolved which accepts the authenticity of the 'Ανατροπή, while questioning that of the two apologetical letters. There are considerable differences in vocabulary, style, and the attitude toward Islam in the letters, when compared to the 'Ανατροπή, and in two places the letters include long quotations from the 'Ανατροπή, with the deletion of several lines highly critical of Muslims.¹¹⁸ James Demetriades further notes,

There is no indication that the letters to which the author of the Epistles responds were really written by Muslims. They rather seem to constitute the occasion for a clarification to Christian readers of the thesis that the doctrine of the three hypostases (persons) in the divine nature does not imply the notion of partners (*shurakā*) in or of God.¹¹⁹

Accordingly, Demetriades concludes that the author of the letters put them out under the name of Niketas because he was a known authority on Islam who lived in the time of Emperor Michael III. As for the date of their composition, he opts for "the end of the eleventh or the beginning of the twelfth century,"¹²⁰ largely on the basis of the opinions of earlier scholars about the

¹¹⁴ See Hans-Georg Beck, *Kirche und theologische Literatur im byzantinischen Reich* (Byzantinisches Handbuch, 2. Teil, 1. Band; München: C.H. Beck'sche Verlagsbuchhandlung, 1959), pp. 530-531. For a report on the scholarly debates about Nicetas' chronology see James M. Demetriades, "Nicetas of Byzantium and his Encounter with Islam a Study of the 'Anatropi' and the Two 'Epistles' to Islam," (unpublished Ph.D. thesis; Hartford, Conn.: The Hartford Seminary Foundation, 1972).

¹¹⁵ See the general discussion and outline in Adel-Théodore Khoury, *Les théologiens byzantins et l'islam; textes et auteurs (VIII^e-XIII^e s.)* (Louvain & Paris: Nauwelaerts, 1969), pp. 110-162.

¹¹⁶ See *PG*, vol. CV, cols. 807-842.

¹¹⁷ See *PG*, vol. CV, cols. 669-806.

¹¹⁸ See Demetriades, "Nicetas of Byzantium and his Encounter with Islam," pp. 70, 75, & 109.

¹¹⁹ Demetriades, "Nicetas of Byzantium and his Encounter with Islam," p. 116.

¹²⁰ Demetriades, "Nicetas of Byzantium and his Encounter with Islam," p. 116.

texts attributed to Niketas in the manuscript tradition.¹²¹ He accepts the authenticity of the *Ἀνατροπή* as the work of a Niketas who lived in the ninth century on the basis of the stylistic studies of this work, in comparison with the style and vocabulary of Photius, done by Joseph Hergenrother already in the nineteenth century.¹²² While since 1972 no scholar other than Demetriades has addressed himself in any detailed way to the issue of the authenticity of the works attributed to the ninth century Niketas, it is notable that his opinion on the assumed authenticity of the three works on Islam stands in contrast to that of Adel-Théodore Khoury, heretofore the most prominent, published authority on these texts.¹²³ Nevertheless, given the purpose of the present essay to discuss the situation in the ninth century, we may confine ourselves to some remarks about the surer work of the ninth century Niketas, the *Ἀνατροπή*.

The *Ἀνατροπή* is composed of an introduction, in which the author dedicates his work to the unnamed reigning emperor,¹²⁴ followed by an exposition (*ἔκθεσις*) in which he demonstrates the reasonableness of the Christian doctrine of the Trinity,¹²⁵ which is then followed by eighteen refutations (*ἐλεγκτικοί*) in which he attacks the credibility of the successive *surahs* of the *Qurʾān*.¹²⁶ At the end of the work he discusses twelve issues in Islamic teaching, practice, and polemics in particular, but without any reference to the order of the *surahs* of the *Qurʾān*.¹²⁷ The heart of the work is then in the refutations of the *Qurʾān*, which presuppose a somewhat detailed knowledge of its contents, and suggest the availability of a Greek translation of the Islamic scripture.¹²⁸

After the dedication to the emperor in the introduction, Niketas furnishes the reader with a brief table of contents of the work, and then proceeds directly to the exposition on the doctrine of the Trinity, and the beginning of his refutations of the *Qurʾān*. What immediately strikes the reader familiar with Christian apologetic texts in Arabic is the similarity of Niketas' process of reasoning in his defense of the doctrine of the Trinity to that which Christians employed in the world of Islam. After defining the terms and setting out the parameters of his discourse, he defends the reasonableness of

¹²¹ See Demetriades, "Niketas of Byzantium and his Encounter with Islam," p. 116, with reference to pp. 14-16.

¹²² See Joseph Hergenrother, *Photius Patriarch von Constantinopel* (3 vols.; Regensburg: Georg Joseph Manz, 1867-1869), vol. II, pp. 645-649. See Demetriades, "Niketas of Byzantium and his Encounter with Islam," pp. 3-8, 118-119.

¹²³ See Khoury, *Les théologiens byzantins et l'islam*, pp. 110-133.

¹²⁴ See *PG*, vol. CV, cols. 669-672.

¹²⁵ See *PG*, vol. CV, cols. 673-701.

¹²⁶ See *PG*, vol. CV, cols. 701-777.

¹²⁷ See *PG*, vol. CV, cols. 777-805.

¹²⁸ On this subject see Erich Trapp, "Gab es eine byzantinische Koranübersetzung?" *Diptycha* 2 (1980/1981), pp. 7-17.

the doctrine of three divine *hypostases* in a single divine being (οὐσία) on the basis of an analysis of the divine attributes of power, fecundity, and holiness. In other words, like Arab Christian writers, he puts the discussion into the context of the current debate among the Muslims about the ontological status of the *ṣifāt Allāh*, the “beautiful names of God.” This procedure suggests some familiarity with how Christians argued their case in Arabic. Having accomplished this objective, he then turns his attention to the *Qurʾān*, and right from the beginning his polemical purposes are evident in the language of invective he employs to demean the scripture of the Arabs. This posture puts him very much at odds with the agenda of the Arab Christian writers.

Niketas begins straightaway to defame the *Qurʾān*. Already in the introductory exposition on the doctrine of the Trinity he says, “The unreasonable Moamet, in his forged book, mistakenly satirizes Christians as describing partners and associates to God.”¹²⁹ When he then comes to the refutations of the *surahs* in order, in ἐλεγκτικοί I–XVII, he begins with a fairly detailed discussion of selected verses from the first eighteen *surahs*, commenting particularly on those passages which have a relevance to Christians. Then in ἐλεγκτικός XVIII, proceeding more quickly and selectively, he quotes and comments on a number of passages from the rest of the *surahs*, from XVIII to CXIV. At the end of the Ἀνατροπή, in his discussion of the twelve issues of Muslim belief and practice which especially concerned him. Nicetas discusses a number of *Qurʾān* verses, but not in their canonical order. Throughout his commentary he speaks disparagingly of the scripture as a whole whenever the opportunity presents itself. Already in the first refutation he announces his intention to overturn the *Qurʾān* from its foundation “because the whole of it is rotten (σαθρόν) and as easy to be thrown down, as an ill-built, decayed house without any dependability and security, constructed badly of cheap material.”¹³⁰ He goes on to complain of its helter-skelter arrangement, with no logical order, pointing out that the contents of the *surahs* have nothing to do with their titles. Frequently Niketas uses words like μῦθος and μυθογραφία to characterize the whole text. He complains that “whatever Moamet offers from the Old and New Testament is false. Moreover he mentions events which neither are described in nor are in accord with the Holy Scripture.”¹³¹ Several times he calls the message of the *Qurʾān* “Manichaean.”

¹²⁹ *PG*, vol. CV, col. 685. English translation by Demetriades, “Nicetas of Byzantium and his Encounter with Islam,” p. 25.

¹³⁰ *PG*, vol. CV, col. 704. English translation by Demetriades, “Nicetas of Byzantium and his Encounter with Islam,” p. 25.

¹³¹ *PG*, vol. CV, col. 712. English translation by Demetriades, “Nicetas of Byzantium and his Encounter with Islam,” p. 95.

He says Muḥammad was "influenced by Manichaean teachings and monstrosities."¹³² As Niketas sees the matter,

It is manifest that the message of Moamet is not coming from the one who has dictated the Scripture, as it is also obvious that the adulteration of the Scripture is not coming from the same source, but it is inspired either by a Manichaean or by a demon.¹³³

In the end, Niketas is of the opinion that the *Qurʾān* is from the devil. He says,

Since the cursed book is alien to and different from the thinking of the Scripture, and since they [the Muslims] are unworthy of God's testament, one must know that Moamet's bible, claimed to be given from heaven is inspired by a demon. Whatever is alien to God, is essentially against God, and it has a demonic origin.¹³⁴

One cannot here review, even in a general way, all of Niketas' comments on the single verses of the *Qurʾān*. He delights in pointing out inconsistencies and what he regards as barbarisms in the text, as well as perceived misunderstandings of the Bible. It will suffice for the present purpose to discuss his treatment of two important passages, *an-Nisā'* IV: 157-171, and *al-Ihlās* CXII. The first of them was widely used by Arab Christian apologists in defense of the doctrine of the Trinity, and Niketas' discussion of the second one of them was to influence Byzantine polemic against Islam for centuries to come.

Christian writers in the world of Islam often quoted from *an-Nisā'* IV:171 to show that the *Qurʾān* admits that God has a Word and a Spirit. In fact, the author of the text purporting to recount Theodore Abū Qurrah's debate with some Muslim *mutakallimān* before the caliph al-Ma'mūn in Ḥarrān in the year 829 built his whole apologetical argument on an explication of this verse.¹³⁵ His attempt was to articulate Christian faith in the terms of the *Qurʾān* and to prove that even the Islamic scripture testifies to the veracity of Christian faith. Niketas, on the other hand, and by contrast, pays relatively little attention to the verse. He translates the most important sentence in it literally: "Ὁ Χριστὸς Ἰησοῦς υἱὸς Μαρίας ἀπόστολος Θεοῦ ἐστὶ καὶ Λόγος αὐτοῦ,

¹³² PG, vol. CV, col. 712. English translation by Demetriades, "Nicetas of Byzantium and his Encounter with Islam," p. 33.

¹³³ PG, vol. CV, col. 756. English translation by Demetriades, "Nicetas of Byzantium and his Encounter with Islam," p. 97.

¹³⁴ PG, vol. CV, col. 729. English translation by Demetriades, "Nicetas of Byzantium and his Encounter with Islam," p. 96. In Byzantium, Theodore Abū Qurrah too is made to claim that Muḥammad was an enemy of God and possessed by a demon. See Gleij & Khoury, *Johannes Damaskenos und Theodor Abū Qurra*, pp. 98 & 99.

¹³⁵ See Griffith, "The Monk in the Emir's *Majlis*."

ὅν ἔρριπεν πρὸς τὴν Μαρίαν, καὶ Πνεῦμα ἐξ αὐτοῦ.”¹³⁶ But then he uses it not so much as the opportunity for an apology for the doctrine of the Trinity, but as a pretext for a personal attack on Muḥammad. He says, addressing the prophet,

You insane fool, if Christ is the Word of God, as you say, whatever he says is true. He says he is the Son of God; for you yourself say the Gospel is known to be from God, therefore Christ is to be believed. . . . This is the marvel, that while he calls Christ the Word of God, and says the Spirit is from Him, he cannot conceive of what comes from God's being, and is most properly His, as being of his same being (ὁμοούσια αὐτοῦ), and so to be adored as one God in three *hypostases*.¹³⁷

Similarly, in the *Ἀνατροπή* Niketas makes much of his claim that Muḥammad taught that God is “spherical” (ὀλόσφαιρός), and therefore that he is a solid body, subject to gravity. He introduces the notion early in the work,¹³⁸ but it relies on his translation of *sūrat al-Ihlās* CXII: “Εἰπε, αὐτός ἐστι Θεὸς εἷς, Θεὸς ὀλόσφυρος· οὐκ ἐγέννησεν, οὐδὲ ἐγεννηθη· οὐδὲ ἐγένετο ὅμοιος αὐτῷ.”¹³⁹ He uses the Greek word ὀλόσφυρος to translate the Arabic term *aṣ-ṣamad*, a famous *crux interpretum* in the *Qurʾān*, which modern translators into English usually render as “eternal,” or “source,” or even “uncaused Cause of all being.” Earlier, or perhaps contemporary with Niketas, the Greek reporters of Abū Qurrah’s responses to the Muslims used the Greek term σφυρόπηκτος,¹⁴⁰ i.e., “beaten solid into a ball” to render the Arabic term. It reflects their knowledge that the Arabic verbal root *ṣ-m-d* can mean to hit or to beat something. Niketas then used this very literal translation value, probably originally chosen for polemical reasons, to claim that Muslims believe in a material, corporeal God.¹⁴¹ It was a polemical notion, a bit of purposeful disinformation which was to have a long career in Byzantine, anti-Islamic propaganda.¹⁴²

Niketas’ very literal, and often quite good translations of passages from the *Qurʾān* into Greek raises the question of whether or not he was himself Arabophone, or whether he used an already existing translation. Most modern writers incline to the latter view,¹⁴³ and one scholar, on the basis of his examination of several passages, even thinks that the translator must have been a Syrian, whose native language was Syriac. But then he goes on to suggest that Constantine, he who became the Cyril of Cyril and Methodius, the

¹³⁶ PG, vol. CV, col. 736B.

¹³⁷ PG, vol. CV, col. 736B.

¹³⁸ See PG, vol. CV, col. 708A.

¹³⁹ PG, vol. CV, col. 776B.

¹⁴⁰ See Glci & Khoury, *Johannes Damaskenos und Theodor Abū Qurra*, p. 98.

¹⁴¹ See also PG, vol. CV, cols. 784-788.

¹⁴² See Daniel J. Sahas, “‘Holosphyrōs’? a Byzantine Perception of ‘the God of Muhammad,’” in Yvonne Yazbek Haddad & Wadi Zaidan Haddad (eds.), *Christian-Muslim Encounters* (Gainesville, Fla.: University Press of Florida, 1995), pp. 109-125.

¹⁴³ See Khoury, *Les théologiens byzantins et l’islam*, pp. 119-120.

apostles of the Slavs, might have brought back an Arabic *Qurʾān* from his visit to Baghdad/Samarra in the mid-ninth century, and subsequently translated it into Greek in Constantinople.¹⁴⁴ One might the more plausibly propose that the *Qurʾān* translations were supplied by some one of the numerous refugees from Palestine in Constantinople in the ninth century, especially monks from the Holy Land monasteries, who already had experience in Muslim/Christian dialogue. In particular one thinks of someone like John the Deacon, who did so much to popularize Abū Qurrah in Byzantium. Surely we do not need to look much further than the environs of the monastery of Chora for the translators of the Muslim scripture into Greek. And one should not too quickly dismiss the idea that the many, so-called misperceptions in the translation were in fact knowledgeable, and polemically inspired renderings.¹⁴⁵

“Melkite” versus Byzantine Polemic

The comparison between the responses of Niketas Byzantios and Theodore Abū Qurrah to the challenge of Islam gives one a good idea of the contrasting theological and polemical agendas in Constantinople and Jerusalem in the ninth century. The Byzantine writer is bent on invective and derision, secure in the unchallenged synthesis of his own theological horizon. The “Melkite” writer is faced with the task of commending his faith in the new cultural world of Islam, in the very idiom of Islam’s challenge to Christianity’s most fundamental tenets. This striking difference persists in even the most polemical texts to emanate from the Christians in the world of Islam, texts which dispute the veracity of the claims of both Muḥammad and the *Qurʾān*. The discussion nevertheless takes place within an intellectual framework presented by Islam, and it is within this framework, and in its terms, that the writers must present the truth-claims of a Christianity seeking inculturation within a new commonwealth, culturally and civilly at odds with Byzantium.

Two Arabic texts in particular, with roots in the ninth century, rejected both Muḥammad’s claim to prophecy and the *Qurʾān*’s status as a vehicle of divine revelation. They are the Christian Bahîrâ legend¹⁴⁶ and the so-called

¹⁴⁴ See Kees Versteegh, “Greek Translations of the Qurʾān in Christian Polemics (9th Century A.D.),” *Zeitschrift der deutschen morgenländischen Gesellschaft* 141 (1991), pp. 52-68.

¹⁴⁵ A small example of a polemically rendered meaning of an Arabic word in the *Qurʾān* may be seen in Nicetas’ report that Muḥammad taught that man came from a leech—“λέγει ὅτι ἐκ βδέλλης ὁ ἄνθρωπος γίνεται.” *Refutatio Mohamedis*, PG, vol. CV, col. 708. The reference is to a verse in *al-ʿAlaq* XCVI:2, “*ḥalaqa l-insāna min ʿalaqin*/He created man from a germ-cell.” The Arabic word *al-ʿalaq* has a variety of meanings, among them are “leech,” “blood clot,” “germ cell.” It requires a knowledgeable person to exploit for polemical purposes the *double entendre* inherent in the use of the Arabic word.

¹⁴⁶ See Richard Gottheil, “A Christian Bahira Legend,” *Zeitschrift für Assyriologie* 13 (1898), pp. 189-242; 14 (1899), pp. 203-268; 15 (1900), pp. 56-102; 17 (1903), pp. 125-166. See also

al-Hāshimī/al-Kindī correspondence.¹⁴⁷ In no uncertain terms, these documents reject Islamic religious claims, and they do so largely in the idiom and within the framework of the burgeoning Islamic religious sciences in the ninth century. This fact marks their notable difference from even the most savvy Byzantine polemic, such as that written by Nicetas. The culture of the world of Islam, in which the Christians in the caliphate participated, affected the doing of theology as well as the course of daily life. And this fact helped make them strangers to their co-religionists in Byzantium and the west when next they met at the time of the Crusades.

IV *A Decisive Moment in the Ninth Century*

Professor Albert Hourani has memorably written of the Islamic and Christian communities that they have "faced each other across the Mediterranean for more than a millenium with a look of uneasy recognition in their eyes."¹⁴⁸ He could have almost used the same phrase to characterize the views of the Christian communities living in the patriarchates of Rome and Constantinople, and their co-religionists living in the world of Islam, in the oriental Patriarchates of Alexandria, Antioch and Jerusalem. The cultural frontier between the world of Islam and the Greek and Latin-speaking west became a cultural barrier from the ninth century onward. The barrier was breached on occasion, particularly in the ecclesiastical milieu, and specifically in the "Melkite" community, which shared the faith of Byzantine Orthodoxy, unlike the "Jacobite"¹⁴⁹ and so-called "Nestorian"¹⁵⁰ churches, who, for both linguistic and theological

S.H. Griffith, "Muhammad and the Monk Bahīrā: Reflections on a Syriac and Arabic Text from Early Abbasid Times," *Oriens Christianus* 79 (1995), pp. 146-174.

¹⁴⁷ See Anton Tien (ed.), *Risālah 'Abd Allāh b. Ismā'īl al-Hāshimī ilā 'Abd al-Masīh ibn al-Kindī yad'ūhu bihā ilā l-Islām wa risālah 'Abd al-Masīh ilā l-Hāshimī yaruddu bihā 'alayhi wa yad'ūhu ilā n-Nasrāniyyah* (London, 1885). Tien's own English translation is published for the first time in N. A. Newman (ed.), *The Early Christian-Muslim Dialogue; a Collection of Documents from the First Three Islamic Centuries* (Hatfield, Pa.: Interdisciplinary Biblical Research Institute, 1993), pp. 355-545. See also Bénédicte Landron, *Chrétiens et musulmans en Irak; attitudes nestorienne vis-à-vis de l'Islam* (Paris: Cariscript, 1994), pp. 78-88.

¹⁴⁸ Albert Hourani, "Patterns of the Past," in Thomas Naff (ed.), *Paths to the Middle East; Ten Scholars Look Back* (Albany: State University of New York, 1993), p. 49.

¹⁴⁹ The term "Jacobite" could be used by "Jacobites" themselves in the Middle Ages to include: Copts, Ethiopians, Nubians, and Syrians. See Samir Khalil Samir, "Les confessions chrétiennes, d'après al-Mu'taman Ibn al-'Assāl (vers 1263)," [Arabic], *Al-Machriq* 66 (1992), p. 485. See also the remarks of Andrew Palmer, "The History of the Syrian Orthodox in Jerusalem, Part Two: Queen Melisende and the Jacobite Estates," *Oriens Christianus* 76 (1992), p. 74.

¹⁵⁰ While it enjoys a wide usage in the scholarly literature, the adjective "Nestorian" is a polemical term often used by the adversaries of the church so-called. Many modern scholars now refer to the Assyrian Church of the East. See Sebastian P. Brock, "The 'Nestorian' Church: a Lamentable Misnomer," *Bulletin of the John Rylands University Library of Manchester* 78 (1996), pp. 23-35.

reasons, became permanently alienated from both Constantinople and Rome in the century before the rise of Islam. But even the "Melkite" community experienced a measure of irreversible estrangement, beginning in the ninth century, which no amount of Greek presence in the east in the centuries after the year 1050 could completely displace. The elements of this estrangement have been under discussion in the present essay: the break in ready communication between Constantinople and Jerusalem from the early years of the ninth century until the time of the Crusades; the adoption of the Arabic language alongside Greek in the "Melkite" communities; and the prevailing imperative in the world of Islam for Christians to articulate their faith in an Arabic idiom calculated to respond to the religious challenge of Islam.

The conclusion of the present study is that the socio-historical circumstances obtaining in the Christian communities in the world of Islam for just about two centuries, specifically from the early ninth to just about the mid-eleventh centuries, became the occasion for the inculturation of Christians into the Islamic commonwealth to the extent that a new Christian profile emerged in the Oriental Patriarchates, with lineaments so particular to itself as to describe a new ecclesial identity, even in the world of the "Melkites." To this very day, both the "Orthodox" and the "Catholic" churches of Antioch and Jerusalem sit somewhat uneasily between their Greek and Arabic heritages.